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CHRISTMAS DAY WITH SIR FOGRASS FOGRASS FOGRASS, BART.

CHRISTMAS DAY;

AND

How it was Spent

BY FOUR PERSONS IN THE HOUSE

OF

Fograss, Fograss, Mowton, and Snorton, Bankers.

BY CHRISTIAN LE ROS.

Quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes?—VIRGIL.

ILLUSTRATED BY PHIZ.

LONDON:
GEO. ROUTLEDGE & Co., FARRINGDON STREET.

1854.

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TO

F. E. W.

THIS LITTLE VOLUME

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY THE AUTHOR.

Gray's Inn,
December, 1853.

PREFACE.

A FEW years since we were invited to a launch at Blackwall. The ship was a large East Indiaman; she was adorned with flags, a band of music was stationed on board, the company assembled to witness her entrance into life were both numerous and select, and the pretty delicate costumes of ladies contrasted with the rough habits of the shipbuilders. The signal was given, guns fired, the ship was christened by a wealthy East India Director's daughter, and, amidst the shouts of the spectators, the vessel glided into the water. After the

ceremony we partook of a splendid *déjeúner*, at which noble lords and rich shipowners made long speeches, and the reporters drank much champagne, and afterwards wrote excellent accounts of the affair in the newspapers.

Going back to London by water we passed a small shed, nearly opposite Greenwich; under this shed was a fishing smack, just finished building, and as our steamer shot by, the little thing glided smoothly off her slips into the water. No guns were fired, no band played, no breakfast was given, and no speeches were made. Only the builder and two boys (perhaps his sons) paid heed to this launch; but it was of as much importance to them as the larger one was to its wealthy owners, and the poor man watched his craft on the water with quite as much, nay with more, anxiety.

So is it in literature, there are great works by well-known authors, that, like the big vessels, built by rich builders, are brought into the world with roarings of cannon and the cheerings of the public; and there are others that modestly slip into life without a single cheer, but wait patiently for notice, and meekly offer themselves to the public taste. My small book is of this latter class; it modestly asks the world to pay a little heed to it, to give a single breeze to fill its tiny sails. The same broad river flows into the same mighty ocean, under the bows of the fishing smack as of the East Indiaman.

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CHRISTMAS DAY,

AND

How it was Spent.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

Every one who has passed through the great street for bankers in London must have noticed on the mahogany doors of one of the largest houses a very bright brass plate, inscribed "Fograss, Fograss, Mowton, and Snorton, Bankers." It is with this most respectable firm we have to do business, or rather, with four persons connected with it; so, if you please, gentle reader, we will introduce you to part of the human contents of the large office. On pushing open one of the doors, the first objects that strike the eye are long lines of desks, stretching their dusky lengths the entire depth of the building;

at the back rows, every variety of faces may be seen bending over gigantic tomes, in which the hands connected with the faces inscribe amounts of fabulous vastness. Other hands enter sums in little white vellum books, the contemplation of which costs many a tradesman a heart-ache, and perchance sends one or two stock-jobbing sporters over to Boulogne with astonishing celerity. At the front range of desks stand or sit several clerks, who handle bundles of bank-notes like mere bundles of rags, and weigh gold with as much apparent recklessness as if it was pounds of plums instead of pounds of sovereigns.

Immediately facing the entrance-door is a large glass case; we will enter this sanctum, if you please. In the centre of the case stands a writing-table, covered with black leather, and ornamented with a ponderous inkstand, a blotting-book, and the "Times" supplement; in three corners are three smaller writing-tables, either the sons or younger brothers of the centre one; the fourth corner is occupied by a small railed desk, in which presides the head clerk of the firm, Mr. Tollinson, a little, wiry man, with a

weazened face and keen grey eyes that twinkle with a most business-like expression. A fire burns brightly in the grate, and a large map of Europe hangs over the chimney-piece.

At the centre table sits Sir Fograss Fograss Fograss, head of the wealthy firm, and the fourth baronet of the family. His great grandfather was the younger son of a good, yet poor house; he embarked in business, progressed rapidly, founded the bank, was made a baronet, filled the office of Lord Mayor three times, married an earl's daughter, sat in Parliament for ten years, and finally died, leaving a flourishing business to his only son, and a goodly sum of money in the funds. The family of Fograss have flourished well ever since his time, and the present baronet, now in his sixtieth year, thinks of retiring shortly from the cares and toils of business. Sir Fograss is a tall, well-made man, not strictly handsome, but with a face expressive of benevolence and good humour. His hair is white, his voice pleasant, and the tones beautifully modulated; to his inferiors he is affable and kind, while to his equals he is endeared by a thousand amiable

qualities. His hours of business are from twelve to three, and are thus employed:—he reads the newspapers for half-an-hour, attends to the affairs of the office for an hour and a half, and makes business-calls in the remaining time; after which his carriage arrives, and he takes his departure.

At one of the corner desks sits, or rather, ought to sit, Mr. Duncan Fograss; but this gentleman pays little attention to business. He is about thirty years of age; possesses a very good-humoured, jolly face, and has a strong affection for all field sports and dumb animals. When he does come to the office, he is usually accompanied by a large setter, who annoys the head clerk by jumping on him, and by generally manifesting an unnecessary amount of misplaced affection; the brute is also extremely offensive to the junior and active partner, as it not only ate his luncheon, consisting of two bath buns, twice in one week, but once actually tore up an accepted bill, and distributed it in very small pieces over the floor of the room. However, as neither Duncan Fograss nor his dog have anything to do with our tale, we dismiss them at once, as also the keen business partner, Mr. Mowton.

Mr. Thomas Snorton is fifty years of age, and the junior partner in the firm. He is the offspring of a *myth*, or rather, as the phrase goes, he sprung from *nothing* to his present position, which he attained by a certain amount of business cleverness, and a habit of *accommodating* himself to the wishes of others. In person Mr. Snorton is rather short, and not over-fat, his face is deeply pitted with the small-pox, two black eyes gleam from it with a mixed expression of abject servility, and false, stuck-up pride, and the nose turns up with a general contempt for any one with a few pounds less in his pocket than he has himself; a mass of coarse iron-grey hair bristles on his head, and the large shapeless mouth plainly expresses self-estimation and vain glorification. Mr. Snorton's gods are his money, his furniture, and gentility,—he bows down and worships them; his views are narrow, and having no social position by birth, he is constantly doing something which he thinks necessary to enable him to keep that which he has attained; his actions are never prompted by liking, but by a consideration of what other people will think of them. He walks with a bustling, fidgety gait,

and is perpetually jingling the sovereigns in his pocket.

We have now to make the acquaintance of two persons in the outer office. At one of the back desks sits Mr. John Tripples, or rather Jack Tripples, as his familiars call him. This individual belongs to the fast school of life: he is a good-looking fellow, with a very large pair of black whiskers, curly black hair, and a face expressive of good-humoured folly, yet not entirely devoid of intellect. He frequents or rather used to frequent the Cider Cellars and the Adelphi, can imitate Paul Bedford in the most admirable manner, and can sing comic songs with elaborate tol de rol fiddle de dol choruses. Whatever faults Jack possesses he certainly never neglected his business, and although a convivial party may keep him up until four or five o'clock, he invariably enters the office at nine in the morning. The fourth person we have to notice usually occupies a little desk just inside the entrance door, on the opposite side to the clerks. This worthy gentleman is the head messenger to the establishment, Mr. Thomas Poundaweek

We can assure you that he has a profound admiration for himself and his own exalted position; there is a kind of quiet dignity about the man that repulses any undue familiarity on the part of his subs. What this is owing to we are not quite clear, unless it is hereditary, for his father had filled the proud position of Parish Beadle, and as our Thomas wears a blue coat with a gold collar and resplendent metal buttons, possibly he fancies that the halo of Beadledom illuminates his own brow. Poundaweek, like Snorton, is dreadfully genteel, but there is this difference between the two, the former is gracious and loftily condescending to his inferiors, while the latter delights in exercising a petty tyranny over those whom fate has cast in the lower scale of fortune.

Having introduced our readers to the four persons we purpose spending Christmas Day with, we have to add that the time and date at which our sketches commence is six o'clock, on Christmas Eve, in the year 18—. Sir Fograss Fograss Fograss had cordially wished his partners a merry Christmas, and hinted to some of the clerks in the office that hampers would arrive for them, or

had arrived, and having slipped something into Poundaweek's hand, had left for his country seat. Mr. Snorton's great coat had been dragged on, and that gentleman had gone his ways; not, however, in the one-horse hooded concern which he persisted in calling "the carriage," as he thought the frosty night air might injure the horse, but in the Clapham omnibus, in which for the first few minutes he had contrived to give the other passengers a very great idea of his own importance, by complaining of the nuisances of public vehicles, bullying the conductor about starting, and threatening the Mansion House and fines, but unfortunately for the ears of the gratified listeners, the head of a large City firm entered the vehicle shortly after, who being known to Mr. Snorton, and of great wealth, our junior partner changed his tone of annoying arrogance to one of fawning civility. The clerks in the bank had taken their departure; Jack, in company with two or three others, to a favourite resort, where the chief attractions consisted of a bagatelle board, and two pretty barmaids. The massive iron safes were let down into their fireproof

repository, which was locked up, and the key safe in the custody of the head clerk. The under messengers were busy sweeping out the office, and letting down the iron shutters, while Mr. Poundaweek took the opportunity of retiring into the glass case to read the "Times," from which he occasionally looked up and glanced at his assistants with the keen eye of superiority. At last all was finished, the men put on their hats and coats, Mr. Poundaweek saw them all out, tried the shutters, and after double-locking the doors, took his departure, leaving the halls of business to silence and solitude.

There is something particularly joyous in the appearance of the streets of London on a Christmas Eve, especially if it is a sharp, clear, frosty night. The foot passengers hurry along with quick, feet-warming strides; omnibuses, cabs, and other vehicles run merrily over the stones. The shops are unusually brilliant, the jets of gas shine with unwonted brightness, and seem to throw a stronger light than on ordinary occasions on the articles arranged in the windows. Heaps of plums and other foreign fruit are temptingly dis-

played at the grocers', the interiors of whose shops present scenes of indescribable confusion; assistants fly and rush about with reckless impetuosity, and try their utmost to satisfy the numerous wants of their customers. Butchers display mighty pieces of beef, in which the fat rivals the lean; the sharp knife and saw are never idle; the national food is sold with astounding rapidity, and the butcher's voice is never silent. "Seven pounds and a quarter, ma'am, four-and-fivepence-halfpenny, thank you—now ma'am, what can I do for you to-night? Here Jem, just hook that sirloin down. Now, Buy, Buy, Buy, Buy!" and so on. The poulterers are, however, in the greatest force. Their shops are dense masses of turkey and poultry; around the former sausages cling in a chainy embrace, and bright-coloured ribbons mock with their flaunting streamers the pallid hues of the devoted birds! As for the master poulterer and his shopmen, we verily believe they are ubiquitous; they seem to be constantly hooking turkeys down from high places, selling, trussing, taking the money for them, and despatching them to their various destinations.

Indeed, so easily does money seem to be made by dealers in provisions on Christmas Eve, that the employment appears a most desirable one to many a perchance needy spectator.

Christmas Eve always makes us merry, when we remember the thousands of happy people the morrow will assemble together. Families united over the social board, business cares and troubles forgotten for a time, nought but mirth and fun abounding, old age and childhood hand-in-hand. Even the poor, whose unhappy lot it is to be seldom fed on substantial meat, contrive to get a good dinner on that day. The games, the rare old English pastimes are brought out and dusted for the eventful night, and every one manages to contribute a laugh to the pleasant-passing hour. We love the eve much, but the day more; and when that day is ushered in, the bells of many steeples awake their iron clappers, and a flood of joyous sound floats through the cold night air.

CHAPTER II.

CHRISTMAS DAY WITH SIR FOGRASS FOGRASS FOGRASS.

The morning of Christmas Day, 18—, broke as brightly as ever day did before. The air was clear and frosty, and the distant hills stood out sharply and distinctly against the light blue sky. The sun came up and shone with a red lurid face, and reflected its feeble rays on the ice which coated the little stream that threads its way by the borders of Fograss Court Park. The grass sparkled with the crystallized dew that concealed its bright greenness; the trees were covered with hoar frost, and their branches shone brightly when the cold bracing wind swayed them to and fro; the roads rang merrily to the horses' hoofs, and the two or three foot passengers in sight trotted steadily along with their noses buried in

woollen comforters, and beating their bodies to promote the circulation of the blood.

Fograss Court is situated in the pleasant county of Kent, about two hours' journey from London. The original building was Elizabethan, but succeeding generations have added to it in different styles of architecture, and consequently the house presents a rather nondescript appearance. Here stands a piece of the original Tudor, with its depressed mullioned windows, joined to a bit of renaissance, with classical decorations, and at one end connected with a ball-room, of almost Strawberry Hill gothic, a brick conservatory runs out, built in imitation of Wren's orangery in Kensington Gardens. Altogether and seen from a distance, the house is picturesque, and as there is very little flatness in the various parts, strong shadows materially heighten the effect of the whole.

All was bustle and excitement inside Fograss Court, the kitchens were heaped with provisions, tremendous fires roared in the grates, and the chimney belched forth so mighty a volume of smoke, that the one policeman in the little neigh-

bouring village almost imagined that "The Court" had fallen a prey to the devouring element. The two cooks were in a great state of excitement and perspiration, and rated their subs with a right good-will. Servants hurried to and fro, to fetch fresh supplies of eatables for the breakfast table, everywhere below evinced signs of bustle and busy preparation, and everywhere above signs of good-humoured joy and happiness.

Sir Fograss Fograss Fograss was a baronet of the old school; many said he was better fitted for a country squire than a London banker. Be that as it may, his chief pleasure lay in making others happy; his tenantry venerated him, and his neighbours and numerous friends admired and respected him. He never failed giving a harvest home and a Christmas dinner annually to all who chose to partake of them; no matter to what station or class they belonged, every one was welcomed with kindness and hospitality. The old house on those days of rejoicing was turned into a public hotel, with this material difference, that the host paid for everything instead of the guests.

On the morning of which we are writing every available room in the Court had its occupant; lords, ladies, baronets, squires, masters, mistresses, and misses, were gathered together for the joyous occasion, and from eight until ten the large breakfast room was constantly emptying itself of satisfied breakfasters, only to be re-filled with fresh detachments of hungry guests. About ten, Sir Fograss and his wife entered the room, followed by several others who wished to know the order of procedure for the day.

"Good morning to all," cried Sir Fograss, "a merry Christmas and a happy New Year to every one."

"The same to you and your family," cried several voices at once.

"How wewy wong of people to wish such horrid old-fashioned vulgarities to each other," observed that sapient Lord Froodle, in a charming lisping voice to his friend, Sir Harry Hablington. The young nobleman was seventeen, a Cornet in the Blues, and utterly *blasé*.

"Oh, very; I wonder you don't shut yourself up altogether on these vulgar festive days," said

Louisa Fograss, the Baronet's eldest daughter, a lively jolly girl of one-and-twenty.

"Now, weally, Miss Fograss, you are too bad, a jeuced deal, you are too bad upon us young fellers," replied the young lord.

"I should have thought nothing could have touched *you* hard, Froodle," said Fanny Fograss, a cousin of Louisa's; "I thought the Blues were too much men of the world to be hurt by a feeble woman's remark."

"We purpose going to church this morning," said Sir Fograss, in a loud voice, "it is a custom here on Christmas Days; if any of our friends will go with us we shall be very glad of their company."

All said they would go, and as the morning was fine, walking instead of riding was proposed. Immediately there was a rush to the door, and in ten minutes a large party started off for the village church. A very cheerful party it was, too, and a great deal of laughing and talking was heard. The baronet and his lady, accompanied by several old and steady guests, walked on first very sedately and properly. The younger members came

afterwards, and we are compelled to state that the course of their procedure was neither particularly melancholy nor solemn.

"What are those sticks for on the lawn?" asked Lord Froodle, pointing to some firework frames that had been erected.

"Oh, the heavens are going to have an evening party to-night," replied Fanny Fograss.

"What do you mean, Miss Fograss? You are so wewy odd," inquired the puzzled little Lord.

"Why, fireworks always remind me of stars polking and waltzing."

"You should not make such remarks, Fanny, to Lord Froodle," said the Baronet's eldest son, Edward Fograss, a fine young fellow of three-and-twenty. "He 's no astronomer."

"No, I never could manage astwonomy," said the sapient Blue.

At this moment something white flew through the air and struck Edward Fograss on the hat Every one near looked very much astonished, but the mystery was soon explained, the snow which had fallen three or four days before had drifted under the trees, where it still lay; the temptation was

too great to be resisted by Louisa Fograss, who made up a ball and hurled it at her brother, where upon his cousin Fanny stepped forward as his champion, and returned the missile. Lieutenant Ponsford of the Guards now came to the assistance of Louisa; others soon joined the snowy fray, the fierce tide of battle raged with violence, the remaining spectators speedily mixed in the fight, and the air was clouded with the missiles of war. The elder party hearing the shouting and laughter of the combatants, turned to learn the cause of the excitement, when, unluckily, at that moment, Louisa Fograss despatched a snowball at the weak little head of Lord Froodle; happily it missed the seat of his small amount of brains, and, dreadful to relate, struck her own father's hat from his head, and, as old Lord Boynton was standing immediately behind, he stepped back to avoid the blow, knocking his head against Sir Mortram Mc Gillup, who in his turn started, and trod upon the toe of Mr. Fortram, the family tutor, and as that worthy gentleman was raising his foot in pain, he administered a kick to a large dog, that immediately set up a most

unfortunate howl. Thus did all these mishaps occur through a piece of snow thrown by a little white hand, cased in one of Jouvin's six-and-a-quarter gloves.

"Why, Louisa," exclaimed the Baronet, "you are a perfect little David at throwing!"

"With this difference, however, Sir Fograss, Miss Louisa has discomfited four Goliaths instead of one," gallantly remarked Lieutenant Ponsford.

"And very happy are the four giants to become the mark for so fair a thrower," said old Lord Boynton, a nobleman of the George the Fourth *régime*, with a fine polite Bond Street air.

"Hoot mon, but yer ower polite, Lord Boynton. Now I just recollect mysel, my grandfather told me that when Miss Mac Gillup went to meet the Chevalier on his way fra Prestonpans"—at this point of the Scotch Baronet's narrative several persons were suddenly seized with fast walking, fast talking, and fast coughing-fits, as most of them knew the old fellow's Pretender stories by heart, and his audience dwindled away to the family tutor, Mr. Fortram, who listened with great attention to the tale.

"For my part," remarked Lord Froodle, "I think pwactical joking wewy stupid."

"Of course you think everything *practical* slow, don't you?" said Fanny Fograss.

"Yes, it is a bwor," replied the future legislator.

"Only fit for jeuced vulgar fellows, bwutes that work and dig, you know what I mean," said Fanny, mimicking Lord Froodle's voice to her cousin Edward, as she took his arm, and they walked off together, at first talking rather loud, and then letting their voices gradually sink lower and lower, and somehow the rest of the party got before them, and we must confess that Edward looked at her face rather oftener than cousinly affection warranted, and they were the last to turn out of the Park avenue into the road where hat madcap Louisa, with Lieutenant Ponsford, pounced upon them and repeated in a significant tone—

"Oh Love, you 've been a villain, since the days of Troy and Helen,
When you caused the fall of Paris and of very many more;"

at which all laughed, and as, the truth must be

told, Lieutenant Ponsford was engaged to Louisa, and Edward to his cousin Fanny, they all walked on together, looking a very radiant and happy quartet.

The whole party soon arrived at the village; in the churchyard were assembled numerous villagers and tenantry of the Baronet's, the greetings were cordial and respectful, and fully testified the sincerity of their affection for Sir Fograss and his family. Every one was desirous of offering a congratulation to their benevolent patron, who turned to his wife and said:—

"This affects me very much, Margaret. I thank God that we are able to protect and assist our poorer neighbours: may we never abuse the power that is entrusted to us."

"There is something delightful in making people happy," replied his wife, "and you do so always, Fograss; your heart is indeed good and noble. Bless you;" she looked up in her husband's face and saw there responding emotion visibly expressed: she pressed his arm, and in her heart honoured him still more for this silent yet eloquent display of feeling.

The bell ceased its voice of call, and the crowd quitted the churchyard, and entered the quaint little edifice. The Vicar, Dr. Claxton, was a fine venerable old man, a profound scholar and a literary man of no small pretensions. He had taken high honors at Oxford, but quitted the quiet shady walks and studious colleges for the pleasures of a married life, and now, thanks to Sir Fograss, he was comfortably installed in a neat parsonage, and encumbered with a quiet charitable, cheerful lady, and a living of five hundred a-year.

Learned as the Reverend Dr. was, he still possessed a large quantity of sound common sense, and he was perfectly aware that high doctrinal discourses would be unintelligible to the majority of his auditors in an agricultural village; his sermons were therefore shaped to suit the capacity of the most ignorant of his listeners. On Christmas Day the short address was especially simple, the Vicar's full voice rolled with solemn impressiveness through the little pile, he spoke words of comfort to sinners, and placed before them the glories resulting from true religious faith. His

sermon was so excellent and earnest that the veriest trifler listened with pleasure and attention.

When the service was concluded the congregation again assembled in the churchyard.

"My dear friends," said the Baronet, in a loud voice, "you know the old custom at the Court, a dinner at two for such as like to partake of it; let me see a great number of smiling faces around me to-day."

"Thank you, Sir Fograss," was heard from several points, with a strong Kentish-man twang.

"Do you mean to say that these bwores are coming to dine with us?" asked Lord Froodle in astonishment.

"To be sure we do, most noble sir," said Fanny Fograss, "and we shall wait on them our royal selves."

"Now, 'pon my life that's not a good joke, that's going too far," remarked the little Lord.

"And you cannot possibly object to these poor people being made happy by Sir Fograss?" asked Dr. Claxton, who had joined the party with his wife, and overheard Lord Froodle's inquiry.

'Oh no, of course not, but then I don't see why they can't be fed at home; they smell of ploughs and earth," replied the little specimen of nobility.

"What, ho there, sir varlets!" said Fanny, with a wave of her hand, "bring rivers, lakes, gulfs, oceans of *eau de Cologne* for the Lordly Froodle."

"Now you are too bad," said he, getting very red in the face, "you are so jeuced hard on a feller."

"Pray forgive me, but we are such old friends," she replied, "that sometimes I forget you are not a boy now, but a man, and a British officer; so give me your hand and let's be friends."

"I can't refuse you, pawsitively," replied he, shaking her hand, and looking very like a schoolboy who has just been forgiven an offence.

"I say," said Edward Fograss, "I'm getting jealous of you, Froodle, you are quite monopolizing Fanny."

This remark completely restored the Blue's equanimity of temper.

"I nearly gave him *another* commission in the *Blues* to-day," said Fanny, archly, as she took Edward's arm.

The Baronet's own party and a large number of villagers had by this time reached the park avenue, and a very joyous train it was altogether, and frequent bursts of merriment alarmed the rooks in their retreat, who cawed forth a remonstrance, and no doubt chatted to themselves concerning the unusual noise and bustle. The various parties, however, soon dispersed; some made for the pond; others walked about, talking and laughing; whilst several hastened to the house to collect "properties," and make arrangements for the charades which were to form part of the evening's amusement.

The lawn in front of Fograss Court, about half-past one in the day presented a most lively aspect; the smooth, sloping turf, dotted here and there with large oaks, and wide-spreading solemn yew trees, whose branches threw a faint shadow on the ground, was covered with people of all ages, sizes, and ranks. The easy morning-suit of a London swell, with his neat wide-awake and thick shooting-shoes contrasted with the green elaborately embroidered smock frock, turned-up trousers, and long-napped beaver hat of the rustic; broad-backed, top-booted farmers stood side by

side with well-dressed county members ; and the thick, rough coat, military heeled boots, and plush bonnet of a *belle demoiselle*, deigned to flank the scanty-skirted woollen gown, straw bonnet trimmed with smart ribbons, and little gay edged black shawl of a village maid or matron.

On the broad gravel walk before the house a host of laughing faces and active bodies threaded my Grandmother's Needle a thousand times over ; on the large ornamental piece of water were several skaters, and three or four slides of fabulous length, on which the expert at sliding did the "cobbler's tap," and made "candles," much to the admiration of the less experienced. A party also engaged in Hockey flew about with wonderful velocity, flourishing their sticks most vigorously, and knocking each other's shins in a playful, if not a graceful manner. The little stream below was occupied by sledges, in which sat Louisa Fograss, her cousin Fanny, and two or three other young ladies, all full of fun and jollity ; their cavaliers, we are ashamed to say, indulged in cigars, as they drove their fair charges

over the clear surface of the ice with great rapidity.

"I fancy I am in Russia, now," said Louisa Fograss; "this is capital fun, is it not, Fanny?"

"Oh, delightful! just like the land of the Czar; and look! there 's a wild bear."

"Where?" asked Edward.

"Why, there; Lord Froodle is one, isn't he?"

"I think you mean a *boar*," said Louisa.

"What a dreadful joke, Lou," remonstrated Lieutenant Ponsford; "it 's been in every edition of Joe Miller, every burlesque, and in every comic periodical for the last hundred years."

"And not worn out yet," said Fanny; "how strong it must be! that 's a great advantage in old puns, they bear being used often; but new jokes seldom bear repeating more than once,—don't you think so, Lord Froodle?"

"'Pon my life, I think jokes are vewy stupid," he replied; "I never can make them out."

"You can't make a silken purse, &c.," whispered Edward to his cousin.

"For shame, Edward; you have no right to interfere with my property; no one has a right

to abuse the poor little fellow but myself," she replied.

"Ah! papa!" exclaimed Louisa, as the Baronet, accompanied by Sir Mortram MacGillup, Lord Boynton, and Dr. Claxton, approached the edge of the stream, all looking very smiling, and Sir Fograss's eyes beaming with gratified pleasure and benevolence; "we are having such a delightful ride."

"That's right; enjoy yourselves as much as you can. I never was so happy before," said her father, with his eyes beaming with joy; "it's a glorious day, and all the people seem so contented."

"Thanks to you, Sir Fograss," said the Vicar.

"Nonsense, nonsense, it's not my work, it's yours," replied the Baronet, "if you had not kept them in the right path, none of these country-people would have been able to enjoy the simple sports they now engage in with so much keenness."

"But then——" said the Vicar.

"No buts, my dear friend, you shall have the entire credit."

"Well, well," said the Vicar, laughing, "be it so."

"Really, ladies, this reminds me of old days," said Lord Boynton to the sledging party, "when the Prince Regent and myself, with a distinguished party of rank and beauty, enjoyed ourselves with sledges on Virginia water."

"Fancy old Lord Boynton skating," whispered Louisa to Lieutenant Ponsford.

"I can't, for the life of me," was the reply.

"But the men of the present day are sadly deficient and fallen off in politeness; *we* never smoked when ladies were present."

"Oh," exclaimed several ladies at once, "we like it excessively."

"Yes, it scents the hair so agreeably," said Fanny, "doesn't it. Louisa?"

"For my ain part, noo, I mind about sleighing that my grandfather when the Chevalier—" what Sir Mortram Mac Gillup said about sleighing and the Pretender is unknown to every one, excepting a quiet tenant of Sir Fograss, as the rest of the party, pretending not to hear the beginning of the narrative, had dashed off in various directions.

The park altogether appeared devoted to merriment. The Baronet was here, there, and every where, now talking hops, malt-tax, and protection to farmers, then joining a game of romps with some children, anon joking two or three blushing village lasses, and always encouraging every one in their sports, from simple Jack Gammon to the equally simple Lord Froodle, who called everything a "bwor and jeuced slow." As for the rooks, they could stand the noise no longer, so they retired to the trees in a sporting baronet's domain, where they rested in peace and solitude, as the owner, after having run through his estate in three years, (we don't mean literally, but figuratively,) had retired to the continent to recruit his exhausted coffers, by compulsory economy.

At half-past two, the large dinner bell at the Court uttered its hospitable summons; all answered to the welcome call, and speedily the hungry crowd quitted the sports of the park for the feats of the dining-table. This early meal was prepared for the tenantry and farm labourers, and any one else that chose to partake of it. It was

not served in the original old hall of the house, but in a larger one that had been erected in the reign of Charles the Second. This was a very long room, wainscoted with dark oaken panels, on which hung family portraits, from that of Baron Reginald Luce Luce, whose grandfather, or other ancestor, came over, *of course*, with the Conqueror, to the late Lady Luce Fograss, grandmother of the present Baronet, the lady that brought the estate to the house of Fograss, she being the last representative of the noble race of Luce, and on her marriage the mansion changed its name from "Luce Hall" to "Fograss Court."

The portraits were adorned with holly, whose bright red berries formed a strong contrast to the dark faded colors on the canvas; it was placed there to the evident annoyance of two or three of the antiquated lords and ladies, and especially to one fierce-looking gentleman in a military uniform of Queen Anne's time, who appeared to regard the holly decorating his wife's frame with so evil an aspect, that we quite thought he would raise his marshal's bâton and fell the presuming evergreen to the ground. At the lower end of the hall,

immediately over the great entrance doors, was erected, as old Pepys would have called it, a "goodlie gallerie for musique," but it was not now occupied by the "four-and-twenty fiddlers all in a row," who were wont to pour forth sweet melody during the court dances of the "merrie monarch," but by the village band, consisting of eight musicians, who invariably brought their sweet concert of sounds to the Court on Christmas Days. The front of the gallery was also hung with holly. Three large brass chandeliers descended at regular intervals from the roof of the hall, and to the centre one was appended a huge branch of mistletoe, which gave rise to much mirth and harmless fun. Two long tables occupied nearly the whole length of each side of the hall, leaving a free passage up the centre to a cross table at the upper end, which was filled by the Baronet's own friends, who took their luncheon at this hour.

When the doors were thrown open the hungry crowd entered at first with some degree of order and regularity, but the last detachments tumbled in with wonderful haste, only to be accounted for

by the keenness of empty stomachs; the band struck up an old English air as Sir Fograss and his family took their places at the transverse table; the various rustics often tumbling over one another, and creating a great deal of unnecessary confusion, at last shook into their places Immediately after, servants entered in procession, bearing weighty dishes, on which reposed mighty sirloins of beef, Brobdignag turkeys, and piles of vegetables, and the necessary sundries. "The Roast Beef of Old England" was blown, scraped, and tootled by the band until the dishes were placed on the table and the covers removed; after which there was a slight pause, the hum of conversation gradually subsided, the sons of Apollo hushed their melodious labours, excepting the flute, for the ancient musician who played that most melancholy of melancholy instruments, being rather deaf, continued, to the amusement of all present, to pour forth a harsh hoarse whistle long after the others had ceased, and until he was jogged by one of his fellows, when he desisted in confusion, muttering, "What a fool I be, sure*ly*." A short, simple, impressive

grace was said by the Rev. Dr. Claxton, in the "Amen" to which nearly every one in the old hall joined; a pause for a minute or two ensued, and then the full tide of voices rushed forth again in Babellic confusion,—everybody talked to everybody else, and we believe that if each had possessed three tongues instead of one, he would have used them all at the same time.

Soon, however, conversation gave way to the clatter of knives and forks, even the band forgot for a brief period the existence of bars, chords, and common or six-eight time, and gave their minds and mouths up to beef and beer.

"Well now, really this is a very pleasant scene," said Lord Boynton to Sir Fograss.

"Weel now, it just minds me o' the days when grandfather entertained the Chevalier at Mac Gillup Tower," interposed the Scotch Baronet.

"I wish old Mac Gillup had been shut up all his life in Mac Gillup Tower with all my heart," whispered Edward Fograss to Fanny.

"Do you not observe," said Sir Fograss, "what a great amount of innate politeness exists amongst the lower class? look at many of the men,

how careful they are to attend to the women's wants."

"Why the bwors certainly do know how to bewave," remarked Lord Froodle, "but its wewy like the politeness of bwears."

"Every one is not a Froodle in manners," said Fanny Fograss, with mock politeness.

"You flatter me, pawsitively," said the fluttering little Lord."

"The happiness observable in the faces of the people, Lady Fograss, strikes me as the pleasantest part of the picture to-day," said the Vicar.

"Well, I think, Doctor, that our system brings its own reward," remarked her Ladyship.

"Certainly, Madam. It is not merely the fact of your giving them something to eat every year, but it is the assembling them together, uniting and cementing the bonds of fellowship between them," rejoined the Vicar, in an animated tone.

"I conceive too," said his lady, "that by this reunion you create an affection between the employer and the employed, and by placing those on a level here for one day you give the

master an opportunity of seeing that his man is not merely a machine, but a human being, possessed of feelings and actuated by passions as he is himself."

"Bravo, Mrs. Claxton," said the Baronet, "very ably put: why we shall have you bringing out some little tracts on Labour shortly."

"I assure you," replied the Vicar, "that my wife is like a millstream when she once gets off about labour; if she lived in a factory neighbourhood I verily believe she would incite the people to burn the mills, so indignant is she about overwork."

"Well, it is shameful, is it not, Lady Fograss?" asked Mrs. Claxton, whereupon the two ladies entered into discussion on the subject.

"I say, Miss Fograss, hav'nt we anything else to eat but this beef and other solid stuff?" asked Lord Froodle.

"No, we always eat beef and turkey for lunch on Christmas Days, but you can have something else if you like," she replied.

"What's the matter, Froodle?" asked Edward.

Oh, nothing, thank you."

"He wants a little delicacy for his poor little appetite: get him some weak gruel, poor little Blue," said Fanny to Louisa contemptuously.

"If that little monster was'nt so very harmless I should hate him," said Louisa.

In the hall where every one looked so joyous and happy, the influence of Sir Fograss's genial smile could be felt from one end to the other; his face beamed with happiness, and he seemed perpetually going off in a laugh. Justice was at last done to the meat, the small remnants of the once mighty dead were removed, and presently the puddings came, and what a shout the little children gave when they saw them burning in brandy! and wonderful puddings they were too, large enough for a globe dancer to go through his performance on; they were mighty puddings! and we have often wondered where they could have found anything large enough to boil them in, and when they were cut open how dark and rich they looked; and they must have been very good, for presently the clatter of knives and forks made more noise than ever, and we saw so many little boys and girls eat so much

that we have a vague suspicion that powders and pills followed the plums and spices.

Everything must have an end, even a Christmas dinner, and the remains of the puddings were removed, and the tables cleared, only, however, to be replenished with bowls of punch, some very nice home-made wine for the women, bottles of spirits, and flagons of beer. Toasts now began, and the band played after each with great vigour; the Baronet's health was "drunk with enthusiasm," which spoke the heart-felt respect all present entertained for him.

At about four the party from the upper table rose to retire, and as the train passed down the room the others all got up from their seats, and the band essayed "Rule Britannia," but their feeble music was speedily lost in the deafening cheer which arose, and shook the very rafters; the worthy Baronet turned at the door of the room, bowed to the company, and mentally thanked them for this tribute of joyous respect. The party had no sooner quitted the hall when one of the long tables was removed, leaving a clear space; the musicians came down from the gallery for a

short time. The children began to play about, and were soon joined by the young men and women of the party, and a great deal of struggling, screaming, and kissing took place under the mistletoe; and afterwards blind-man's-buff, hunt-the-slipper, and other games were carried on with great vigour. The remainder of the party occupied the two tables and sang songs of great length, the last word of every verse being prolonged and sung through the nose, and it must be confessed—hear it, ye aristocratics of gentility, mark it, ye mushroom tribe of would-be great folks—PIPES, long clay pipes were introduced, and the fumes of Virginian tobacco ascended up to the very roof of the old hall, and desecrated the sanctity of the residence of nobles! One man actually smoked up into the face of the holly-hating gentleman of Queen Anne's time, and as we felt quite confident that he would speedily descend from his frame and chastise the audacious smoker, we quitted the rough genial merriment of the Hall for the more refined yet not less genial merriment of the Drawing Room.

It was now about five o'clock, day had departed,

the red frosty sun had left us in our snow and frost for some more genial land, the rooks had returned to their natural abodes, happy to find their territory again in peace and quietness; a dark bank of heavy clouds extended across the eastern horizon, and the wind ever and anon burst forth in fitful gusts and starts, while the air was piercingly cold, and the ground frozen and slippery.

The coldness without made every one within appreciate the large wood fires that blazed on the two hearths in the drawing-room at Fograss Court. The Baronet and his lady were standing before one of the fires, surrounded by a group of elderly persons, discussing the various duties of landed proprietors, and talking over the scene they had witnessed that day. Louisa, Fanny, Edward, and Lieutenant Ponsford, with several other lively young persons, were arranging the charades for the evening, and meditating mischief against Lord Froodle, and a Mr. Edward Mables, a very amiable, quiet young gentleman, who was at that moment reading "The Lady of Shalott," in a corner of the room. Mr. Mables' had one fault, but

that was a grave one—he made poetry, and was consequently a perfect nuisance to all young ladies possessed of albums, and as he had taken up four of the prettiest pages in Louisa Fograss's, with a long lyric called the "Spartan Bride," of which no one ever read more than the first ten lines, the fair owner had determined to revenge herself, and the whole party were now in solemn conclave concerning the punishment he was to receive Lord Froodle sat at a table playing at a rhyming game, in which one person has to rhyme to a word given him by another. Froodle had to make a rhyme to "Hippopotamus," and he ransacked his little brains for a long time, but at length he was forced to give up the attempt in despair, remarking that it was "jeuced hard on a feller." Several other parties were scattered about the room, engaged in light amusing occupations, and every one looked very pleased and happy.

The French clocks in the room struck the half-hour, and, as the dinner was to be ready at half-past seven, many young ladies were already contemplating the necessity of retiring to dress. The Baronet was engaged in a warm discussion with

Dr. Claxton concerning the Game Laws. Lord Boynton was giving personal recollections of the glorious reign of George the Fourth, Sir Mortram Mac Gillup had caught a new audience for his Pretender stories, the charadists were going into the old hall to see about properties; four or five country neighhours expected from a long distance had already arrived, when suddenly a carriage was heard dashing up the avenue at a furious pace.

"Dear me!" who *can* that be?" said Sir Fograss.

"I should think the horses must have run away," said Dr. Claxton; but at that moment the vehicle stopped with a sudden jerk; the hall door was heard to open, and immediately a footman entered the drawing-room.

"Mr. Snorton wishes to see you, sir, if you please," said the man.

"Mr. Snorton! why, what can he have come for, I wonder?" said the Baronet.

"Did you invite him down?" asked his lady.

"No, my dear. How very odd!"

"Well, papa," said Louisa, "you had better

go and see him, I think. What a bore if he stays to dine!" added she, half aside.

The Baronet left the room, and found Snorton standing before the hall fire.

"Why, Snorton, my dear friend," said he, "this is an unexpected pleasure. Why, I thought you were at home; but I 'm glad you 've come; we have had such a merry day, and mean to have, too, a very merry evening."

As the Baronet shook hands with his partner, he suddenly perceived that his face was very pale, and that his hand trembled violently.

"What 's the matter? are you ill? you look dreadfully pale," said the Baronet, much agitated.

"No, I am quite well; but I bring ill tidings, Sir Fograss," said Snorton, aloud; and then he whispered something into the Baronet's ear. Sir Fograss turned pale likewise, and motioned Mr. Snorton into the library, and the door was shut upon them. The servants who had heard this dialogue were curious to learn the nature of the ill news, and one going to the door of the library heard his master exclaim, "Good God! what is to be done?"

Half an hour elapsed without Sir Fograss re-appearing; Lady Fograss began to get uneasy at his prolonged absence; and the various visitors, as if aware that something unpleasant had occurred, still lingered in the room. At last a servant entered, and told her Ladyship that Sir Fograss wished to speak to her and Mr. Edward. The two left the room; and in about ten minutes the former returned; she looked pale, and seemed nervous and constrained in her manner. The neighbouring guests who were invited to dinner now arrived in quick succession. Lady Fograss received them with her usual kindness; but there was an absence and restlessness in her manner that was soon detected, and it speedily communicated itself to those around, and all were now certain that something uncomfortable had befallen their kind host. In vain Lady Fograss and her daughter tried to keep up the good spirits of the company—their efforts were unavailing; and the latter was naturally anxious to learn the misfortune that had happened. As ill news always flies fast, the domestic who had overheard his master's exclamation, carried it to

the servants' hall, and from thence it had been doled out to the rustics, whose amusements were speedily forsaken, and rough, kindly sympathy was expressed for the Baronet; while surmises of the most extravagant kind went about respecting the affair. The staying visitors departed to dress with a vague, undefined feeling that something had gone wrong, and that the evening was not likely to be quite so pleasant as they had anticipated; and notwithstanding the wish of the family, that the harmony of the day should not be disturbed, a cloud had settled on the house which it was impossible to dispel. The weather, too, outside, had become stormy; the snow fell rapidly; dark clouds bedimmed the sky; and the wind sighed mournfully amongst the branches of the leafless trees.

CHAPTER III.

CHRISTMAS DAY WITH THOMAS SNORTON, ESQ.

If the morning of Christmas Day, 18—, was very fine and bright at Fograss Court, it was almost as clear at Clapham Common, and the sun reflected its red glare on the windows of Mr. Thomas Snorton's house with nearly as much brilliancy as on the little stream we have before mentioned.

The junior partner lived in an ugly brick box, with a knob at the top of it, which knob contained the dinner bell. Now, as the Snorton outdomain only consisted of a garden one hundred and twenty yards long, by sixty yards wide, and as the family invariably dined at six o'clock on every day of the year excepting Christmas Day and Good Friday, and as they never had more than two or three friends stopping with

CHRISTMAS DAY WITH T. SNORTON, ESQ.

them at one time, and as these were never allowed to do what they liked, but were dragged about in "the carriage" from morning to dinner-time; we never could make out the precise use of the dinner bell; and can only give the two following reasons for its existence: firstly, Fograss Court possessed one, and secondly, the Snorton's tolling made itself heard at a great distance, thereby attracting or distracting the attention of the way-farers, and the less ostentatious neighbours.

The brick box of Mr. Snorton was dignified by the name of "The Lodge;" it presented a very neat formal exterior, the windows were painfully bright and clean, the Venetian blinds were all let down to the same distance, and the long window curtains looked as if they were moulded into their forms, and must be broken to alter the folds. The house was shut out from the road by an iron railing and large carriage gates; on the posts of the latter were two bell-handles, labelled severally—"visitors" and "servants;"—under the former some wag of a doctor's boy had written, "to be well shaken

before taken," for which inscription he received a severe shaking from a policeman who had seen him displaying his calligraphic powers. The garden was a model of uncomfortable good order, not a single loose stone obstructed the slippery gravel walks—not a dead leaf was ever suffered to disfigure the smooth ground—the flower beds were cut out with mathematical exactitude, and even the flowers themselves were not permitted to grow in vulgar luxuriousness, but were clipped, tied, and trained into genteel forms, and a moderate quantity of blossoms. In fact, the house and grounds, generally, looked as if they were the property of a geometrician, so regular, angular, and precise was every portion of them.

In-doors the same fastidious neatness was noticeable: the hats in the hall were hung on their pegs with care and attention; not a spot of dirt was visible on the brown holland stair-covering, and woe betide the unhappy person whose shoes deposited the smallest particle of mud on the floor-cloth of the hall. The dining-room presented the same frozen appearance as the rest of the house; the articles of furniture looked set

in their positions, with care and attention to the relative distances between each. No one in his senses would ever dare to sit astride one of the chairs, or to seat himself on them in any way but a stiff, upright, proper position. The black horse-hair couch looked as if it would prick you with its very genteel bristles, if you were to "plump" down upon it. Although this room was dignified by the title of dining-room, it partook rather more of the nature of a parlour; there was a bookcase with glass doors (locked) containing a goodly assortment of well-bound books, very new looking; an upright pianoforte, and a writing-table. The walls were painted and adorned with prints, which, like the books, were very handsomely bound; a huge looking-glass surmounted the fireplace, in a frame ornamented with golden branches, leaves, and fruit of a plum tree, which the Snortons regarded as a first-rate specimen of decorative art. Two easy chairs, that looked dreadfully uneasy, with very stiff antimacassars over the backs of them, stood on each side of the hearth. But *the* piece of furniture was the mahogany dining-table; a very splendid

thing it was too, and the pride of the owner; yet the care and anxiety it engendered was so great, that we should have preferred a common deal one instead; the footboy rubbed it every day for nearly an hour, with a villanous-smelling compound of bees-wax and oil; it was carefully covered up at night, and as carefully looked over every morning by the keen eyes of our junior partner, who pounced upon the slightest scratch, which was grieved and mourned over with as much tenderness as if it had been a wound in the breast of a human being. The table was the constant terror and "bad man" of young Master Snorton, as that young gentleman, being afflicted with the restlessness in his legs common to children from about one to ten years of age, was constantly administering unpleasant kicks on the shining shins of the unoffending mahogany. After performing this feat, he invariably grew very red in the face, and looked as if he was going to cry; upon which down bobbed Mr. Snorton to examine the suffering leg; up he came again with an explosive sigh, and a face of anger, exclaiming, "Another scratch! how dare

you, sir, kick your legs about in that stupid manner; do you think I buy tables at thirty guineas that you may disfigure them, until they are not worth twopence, eh?" Mrs. Snorton now opens out at the young culprit: "How often have I told you, sir, never to come to table with your thick boots on! go and change them this instant;" the other members of the family raise their voices in ust indignation, and amidst a storm of unpleasant remarks, the Master S. hurries from the room to change the offending boots for less formidable "kickers." Thus is this piece of furniture the terror of Master Snorton, and a great anxiety to the rest of the family.

It must not be supposed, however, that the brick-box is not possessed of a drawing-room; there is one up-stairs, and a very nice room it is too, not useful, but decidedly ornamental; in fact, it looks more like a furniture warehouse than a gentleman's room, and smells much of bees-wax and oil. It is a very melancholy-looking place, as the blinds are always kept down to prevent the furniture being damaged by the sun's rays. It contains chairs of every form and

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pattern, *prie-dieu*, lounging, heavy, light, elegant, and ugly; none, however, seem at all made for use or comfort; lots of little tables covered with trumpery nicknacks; a very severe-looking steel stove, so brightly polished that it seems positive sacrilege to light a fire in it; ottomans worked in more than all the colours of the rainbow, by the fair fingers of the Misses Snorton; a grand piano-forte, the keys of which, from being seldom played on, are stiff and hard to strike; a staring wall-paper, that cuts the eye to pieces to look at; numerous prints in gorgeous frames, and a carpet of a "lively pattern," of violent-coloured flowers, thrown over the floor at random.

The glories of this room are, however, seldom exposed, for brown holland hides whatever brown holland can hide. On Christmas Day, however, and other state occasions, the beauties are exposed to view, to dazzle the eyes of the Snortons with their own grandeur.

At a quarter past nine, on Christmas morning, Mrs. Thomas Snorton and his family assembled in the dining-room for breakfast. Mrs. Snorton was a little lady, with a cold, impassible face, that

repulsed anything like a show of affection from those she came in contact with; her chief morning's amusement was an apron and a dusting-brush, and with these weapons she travelled all over the house, removing little specks of dust from sly corners, and generally performing the housemaid's work, much to that functionary's amusement and satisfaction. The two Misses Snorton, Martha and Jane, were young ladies of the same freezing aspect as their mamma, very genteel and very proper in their behaviour; *vulgar* was their pet word; hearty laughing was vulgar, large appetites were so vulgar, simple amusements were shockingly vulgar; in short, anything their genteel friends did not approve of was *vulgar*. They had been brought up at one of the numerous boarding-schools where cramming accomplishments and languages is resorted to; the two young ladies could speak French, Italian, and German, though we would not vouch for a native of any of the countries understanding them. They could draw and paint,—from *copies;* they made wax flowers, worked elaborate patterns in Berlin wool and crochet; sang Italian duets

most wonderfully, but with as much feeling as a couple of marionettes, and executed brilliant concerted pieces on the piano-forte with a mechanical precision quite praiseworthy.

The eldest son, Mr. Thomas Snorton, junior, was about eighteen years of age. He had chosen the Church for a profession, as he thought that a nice easy way of getting a living, and the family were genteelly delighted at being able to say "Thomas is at Oxford." So the young gentleman had entered at Queen's, and was now home after his second term; he was somewhat of a snob, but College life had already upset some of his home gentility, and he was beginning to entertain rather a contempt for the stuck-up nonsense of his family. The little boy before mentioned completes the group.

"Mary, Mary," said Mr. Snorton, in sharp quick tones to his wife, while at breakfast, "look here, and now just see the dust on this writing-table: it 's too bad of the servants."

"Dear me, dear me, how very careless they are!" rejoined his wife, and jumping up from the table she produced the duster from a mysterious corner, and removed the offending specks.

"What a fuss you make about a bit of dirt!" remarked Thomas, junior, in contempt; "why at Oxford we have lots of dirt."

"How I should like to go to your house, then!" sighed the fond mother, as she clutched her duster in a determined manner.

"Rooms, mother, not house: how one of our men would laugh at your calling their cribs houses!" remonstrated the son.

"How vulgar you are, Thomas," said his sister Martha; "talking of men, and cribs!"

"Bother! what do you know about it? we always call one another men," almost shouted the young gentleman.

"This," said his irate father, "all comes of your going into the stables, every morning; I do believe you are losing all ideas of gentility."

"And a good thing too," replied the son, "for hang me if any of you ever do as you like, you are always afraid of gentility and vulgarity, until at last you never enjoy yourselves at all."

"Oh, Thomas, how can you say so!" exclaimed the youngest sister, Jane, "we—"

"Don't you talk, Jane, you pretend to be so nice about eating, I know half the time you are

as hungry as a hunter, and would give anything for a good chop or a steak."

"Really I don't see, sir, what right you have to talk in this way," said the father. "Have you not a home fit for a nobleman; a genteel home with furniture that has cost me a fortune almost?"

"Yes, that's it, here are you at home," warmly replied the son, "with a grand drawing-room that you never use because you're afraid of spoiling the furniture, and you make as much fuss about a house as if it was your own health!"

How far this unpleasant dialogue might have proceeded we cannot say, but Mr. Snorton's eye happened to fall upon his younger son, James, who had slid from his chair, and was hastily trying to efface the marks of some butter he had let fall on the carpet, by rubbing it in with his foot.

"What are you about, James?" asked Mr. Snorton, gazing at the little boy severely.

"Nothing, pa," stammered the child, getting very red in the face.

"Don't tell a story, sir," sharply replied his papa, and pushing back his chair, he bobbed down to look at the carpet.

"Move your foot, James," he continued.

"No, I shan't," said the child resolutely.

"Shan't, sir! how dare you say 'shan't' to me?" rejoined the angry parent, administering a sound box on the ears of the little fellow, which caused him to step back, and disclosed to Mr. Snorton's eyes, two round black spots on the carpet.

"Mary, look here, my dear! It's grease, two spots of grease on our new carpet, and it's scarcely a month old."

"Really," replied the wife, coming to look at the damage, "that boy is only fit to live in a pig-sty. Leave the room, James: in future you shall breakfast in the nursery by yourself."

The little boy quitted the room, sobbing bitterly. Bells were now rung, servants came, cloths and turpentine were brought, and after a great deal of labour the obnoxious grease was removed, and the master and the mistress resumed their breakfast.

"How very shocking of James to tell a story!" piously exclaimed Miss Martha, as soon as order was restored.

"Very, dear," added her sister.

"I do not see that at all," ejaculated brother Tom.

"What, do you mean to defend a lie, eh?" inquired the father fiercely.

"Certainly not," replied the son, "but I defend the boy, because I believe you have taught him to tell stories."

"Thomas, how can you say anything so wicked and vulgar?" said the mamma.

"Why, mother, it's all owing to this nonsense and stuck-up gentility."

"Stuck-up gentility, indeed!" ejaculated Miss Snorton, firing up, "we are as good as anybody in Clapham."

"I should think so," said the equally indignant sister, "and we have Lady Brown, and several very genteel people of great wealth to visit us, that you know, Thomas."

"Bother!" was the reply, "a set of city snobs; I tell you, really great people never trouble their heads about appearances and gentility."

"I don't know what you mean, sir," said the father in a great rage, "by coming home here and insulting your family, when I am expending

a fortune on your education. And then for you to accuse your mother and myself of teaching your little brother to tell lies, I won't have it, sir. I'll cut you off with a shilling, hang me if I don't."

"My dear father, I do not want to quarrel, I merely stated the truth when I said that the course of conduct you are pursuing towards James, teaches the boy deception."

"Very good, sir," replied the father, "what next? go on, sir, go on."

"I will go on. The boy knows as well as possible that any accidental damage done by him to this confounded furniture, is regarded and punished as a fault; no allowance is ever made for him, so at last he endeavours to ward off the punishment by telling a story and shielding himself by a deception. I think, as we have done our breakfast, I had better leave the room until this unpleasantness has blown over. It is certainly a very pretty way to spend a day commonly set apart for rejoicing and happiness. Besides, it's so vulgar to quarrel, isn't it, Martha?" and without waiting for a reply to his sneer, the young man left the room.

As soon as the door was closed the Misses Snorton and their mamma burst forth into a torrent of "how vulgars!" and "what low conduct!" and other terms of indignation. Mr. Snorton said little, but we believe he felt in some measure the truth of his son's remarks. Mrs. Snorton shortly after quitted the room with her duster and apron, but before going on her tour, she went to the kitchen to consult with the cook respecting the plum-pudding. Of course it was to be no vulgar mass of rotundity, but compressed into a tin "shape," to suit the eyes and appetites of gentility.

The two Misses Snorton then left to prepare for church, Puseyism being one of their accomplishments. They went to a very smart church, with a great deal of gilding, and red and blue scriptural texts running all over it, and where the service was beautifully "intoned;" but the great attraction was the incumbent, the Rev. Auriculus Amalfy, who preached the most elegant sermons, about saints of whose existence many poor sinners had never heard at all; and then the "dear man" wore his hair parted down the

middle, and had a very sweet soft voice, and beautiful white hands, with very pink almond nails, so altogether it is not surprising that the young ladies liked to listen to his mellifluous discourses. Young Snorton, it must be confessed, had no great veneration for the Rev. gentleman, in fact he called him "Betsy," much to his sisters' indignation. Tom did not accompany them to church, but locked himself in his room with his little brother, and smoked and read "*Vanity Fair.*"

The head of the family was left alone in an uncomfortable state of mind. He had nothing to amuse him, he never read anything but the city article in the "Times," so he fell to admiring his furniture, and after satisfying himself that the two grease spots were not visible, began to yawn, and wish that he had to go to business, but fortunately an occupation turned up, for the foot-boy entered to commence his table-rubbing, and as the lad was new to the service, the operation was not performed very satisfactorily.

"What are you about, John?" asked his master, who had been watching the boy's awkward attempts.

" Rubbing the table, please, sir," was the reply.

" I'm not pleased," ejaculated the master. " Is that the way you do it? why do you think it's a deal one? do you know that it cost me thirty guineas?"

" Lor, sir, did it? "

" Yes it did, and you are going the right way to spoil it, with your stupid carelessness. Look here now," said Snorton sharply, and taking the cloth from the boy's hand. " Now pay attention. See me, so, so, this is the way," he continued, and forthwith commenced a lesson in the art of rubbing a table, to his servant, who, during the operation indulged in various pantomimic performances, behind his master's back " There, now," said Mr. Snorton, after a little labour, " that' s the way ; mind you do it properly in future, or you shall be dismissed, mind that."

When the important operation was finished, Mr. Snorton yawned again, and looked round the room with a dreary, blank expression, and wondered what he should do next; then he thought Christmas Day rather a mistake, and wished he had brought home his private account book; at last he determined to go for a walk, and was

ust leaving the room for that purpose, when he heard a loud shout proceeding from the garden; he turned to the window to learn the cause, and there, to his horror, he beheld on *his* grass plot, behind *his* house, in sight of all *his* neighbours, *his* two sons playing at leap-frog, and the eldest smoking a short pipe; out he rushed with a purple face, and cried, with a choked utterance, "What, what! what does this mean, sir?" addressing his heir.

"What's the matter, governor?" was the cool reply.

"Matter enough, here are you, on a Christmas Day, playing at leap-frog and smoking a filthy pipe in sight of Lady Brown's window; what will she think of your vulgarity, eh sir?"

"I don't know, and I don't care for the old woman," said the son, carelessly.

"But I do," answered the angry sire; "what will people think of it?"

"The old song again, set to a new accompaniment. It's always the bugbear *gentility;* you not only make your own life a perpetual series of strivings and uneasiness, but you stifle

all good honest enjoyment for the sake of keeping up false appearances to other people, that don't care twopence about you."

"Very well, sir, I shall not forget this, sir," said the father, "a pretty return you make me for all the money I have expended on you."

"Sir, I do not mind what you say to me, but rather than have that gentility forced down my throat, I would break stones in the road."

"You have a great deal of pride, certainly, to disgrace the position of your family by talking in that manner."

"I have pride, father, real pride, not the base sentiment that forces me to cringe before the wealthy, or to sacrifice my own and my family's comfort for the sake of keeping up a false position. But do let us get over this day comfortably, to-morrow we will talk as unpleasantly as you please; come along, James," he continued, "let's go for a walk."

The two left the garden, and Mr. Snorton rushed in-doors.

"Mary, Mary," he exclaimed, to his wife, "that boy Thomas is the most ungrateful son in the

world: he has not a spark of gentility in his whole body; he has insulted me dreadfully. I never spent such a day before,—I almost wish there were no Christmas Days."

"Well, dear, it is very wrong in Thomas, but forget it for the present, and come and help me uncover the drawing-room," replied his cold, impassible better half.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Snorton, delighted to have something to do.

Up-stairs they went, and entered *the* room; the blinds were drawn up, and the furniture seemed to wink and blink at the unusual quantity of light that shone on it; Mr. and Mrs. Snorton removed brown holland, and displayed dazzling wool work and smart damask chair covers; the grand piano-forte was opened, the stamped table-cloth placed on the centre table, the best-looking visitors' cards were poked up to the top of the card tray, and the Joneses and Smiths concealed at the bottom; Miss Snorton's albums, full of weak inanities, were brought out for the *amusement* of the expected guests, and the fire was laid, under strict superintendence, in the polished

steel grate. After all was finished, the worthy couple stood on the hearth-rug, and looked round with feelings of gratified and expectant pride.

"I say, Mary," said Mr. Snorton, "it looks very handsome, doesn't it?"

"Yes, very, but it's much too good to use," answered the wife with a sigh.

"Ah, that's it; by jingo, it has cost me nearly four hundred pounds to furnish, that it has," said the husband, jingling his sovereigns and smiling self-satisfied.

The domestic conversation was here interrupted by a ring at the visitors' bell, hearing which the gentleman hurriedly put a lighted match into the grate, and descended to the dining-room to receive any comers, and the lady ran up-stairs to get rid of her apron and duster. The boy in buttons answered the gate and let in the two Misses Snorton from church.

"Ah, girls, is that only you? I thought it was a visitor," said the papa, as the two young ladies entered the dining-room.

"Oh, papa, we have had such a very impressive sermon to-day," said the eldest. "Wasn't it, Jane?"

"Lovely, dear," was the delighted reply.

"Was it? and I have been having a sermon from your brother at home!" said the papa.

"Have you? how very low Thomas seems to have grown since he has been to Oxford: he has lost all his sense of propriety," replied the eldest, in a cold tone of voice.

"Yes, papa, it is very bad, I wish he would go to hear Mr. Amalfy: it would do him good, he is so very genteel and not in the least vulgar."

Mrs. Snorton now entered, followed by a servant carrying a small lunch, consisting of a little bit of chicken, a little sherry, and a few cakes, in a very *large* silver basket; there were also plenty of silver articles for use, and plenty of cut glass, but very little to eat; however, the Snorton girls, it was generally believed, lived on merry-thoughts of fowls, and half-glasses of wine-and-water; at least they seldom took more in public, but a servant in the establishment once said she found a portion of a large cake in a private cupboard belonging to the youngest Miss Snorton, but as this was a housemaid discharged on having been caught with her fingers in the

pickle glass, we cannot vouch for the truth of the statement.

The "little lunch" was going on very comfortably, when suddenly a thick cloud of smoke found its way into the room, and gradually covered up the contents with a black fog. Up jumped Mrs. Snorton, thinking the kitchen-chimney was on fire, the two Misses Snorton gave little genteel screams, and both suggested that the house was in flames, but Mr. Snorton only looked astonished for a moment, when, recollecting the drawing-room fire, he started from the table and rushed up-stairs, followed by the rest of the family, and the party found, to their horror, that *the* room was full of smoke. After the windows and doors were all thrown open, Mr. Snorton proceeded to rake out the fire, and upon looking up the chimney to learn what caused the annoyance, he discovered that the top of the register stove had not been opened; great was the anger, and greater the confusion, and greater still the lamentations over the idolized furniture. Everybody dusted and cleaned, and at last the room was cleared of the smoke and its attendant

blacks, and the fire re-lighted in the chilly steel grate.

It was now about two o'clock, and as the dinner was to be ready at half-past three, the ladies retired to dress, leaving their *Pater-familias* continuing his examination of the damage done by the smoke. There he was, bustling about with his little fidgety gait, a true type of his class, ever trying to gain more wealth and position, and remaining alone in the world, with too much false pride to mix with his own equals, in taste and habits, because he was better off, and not admitted into the circles above him; 'tis true he visited with persons who, like himself, had risen to a position which was after all new and cumbersome to them; they all were trying to do, or to possess something grander, and were constantly endeavouring to out-rival each other, consequently the visits were only visits of *display*, each one trying to dazzle every one else, by a *parade* of his own little importance and consequence.

Mr. Snorton, having concluded his inspection, was about to leave the room to dress, and had just opened the door, when he beheld a dripping-

wet apparition disappear into his son's room, leaving dirty marks on the hitherto spotless stair-covers. He hastened after it, and opening Mr. Thomas's door, he found that young gentleman hastily kicking off some very wet boots and exceedingly moist clothes.

"What does this mean, sir?" the parent asked, in astonishment.

"Simply that I have tumbled into the water," replied Thomas, pitching a boot across the room with violence.

"Tumbled into the water! then may I ask what you were doing on the water?"

"Skating."

"Where?"

"On the round pond."

"To-day?"

"Of course; you don't suppose I did it yesterday, do you? My clothes would have been dry now, if I had."

"On Christmas Day, too, in sight of the Browns coming home from church, no doubt; you have no respect, sir, for our position," almost shouted the parent.

"No, not for your false one; I tell you, I do not want to make a fuss to-day; but I assure you, that when I am at home I shall do as I like, and go where I like."

"Then, sir, if you persist in compromising your family, you shall have no money from me, I can tell you."

"Very well, sir; I have two hands, and I can work," replied the son calmly, but firmly.

Mr. Snorton gazed fiercely at the young man, who returned the gaze mildly but steadily.

"You shall repent of this, sir!" ejaculated Mr. Snorton, in a great rage.

"I regret it should have occurred on Christmas Day; but I tell you, I am sick and tired of this genteel fuss, and wish heartily I was away from it all."

"We will see, sir," said the father; and he abruptly quitted the room. To tell the truth, he was struck with the firmness of his son, and his own heart told him that he was not now nearly so happy as when he lived at Islington many, many years ago, when he went to the pit of the play, and had no fine furniture to worry him.

But this was only momentary; he thought of his carriage, his house, the sovereigns in his pocket, —and self-pride, or rather the demon that had usurped its name and place, came to his aid, and he was once more Thomas Snorton, Esq., of The Lodge, Clapham.

At half-past two, Mr. and Mrs. Snorton and their two daughters were assembled in the drawing-room, with very blue noses and chilly bodies. The fire burned up genteelly, and the room was wretchedly cold. Five minutes after, a one-horse fly drove up, and the boy in buttons announced "Mr., Mrs., and Miss Screwter," and the guests entered.

"Oh, dear! how glad we are you have come!" said Martha Snorton to Miss Screwter, as soon as the how-d'ye-doing was over; "we have such a little dear of an oratory to show you up-stairs."

"Lor, dear! an oratory? how sweet!" was the ecstatic reply.

"Yes;" said Jane; "do come and see it."

The three young ladies wound their arms around each other's waists in a very delightful manner, looking extremely like Graces in a state

of gentility, as they tripped lightly from the room.

"How the dear girls seem to love one another!" said Mrs. Screwter to Mrs. Snorton.

"Oh, yes, do they not? I do believe your Maria is taller than Jane," replied Mrs. Snorton, making her visitor look gratified and delighted.

"Come and take off your things in my room, my dear Mrs. Screwter."

"Thank you, I will."

The two ladies moved off, leaving the two gentlemen talking about Shares and Three-per-Cents. The three young ladies went to the Misses Snorton's bed-room, and saw the oratory, which consisted of a piece of stained glass for the window, a little toilette-table, covered with white muslin, on which stood a plaster figure of the Virgin, and two or three prayer-books and Bibles, revelling in crosses and red and gold illuminations; it looked, altogether, a very nice little comfortable place to be religious in, and fully proved what pious young ladies the Misses Snorton were.

"How pretty!" said Miss Screwter in raptures.

"Do you like it?" asked Martha.

"Oh, very much," was the reply.

"It's so genteel too, Lady Brown has one," added Jane.

The two mammas now entered, and after Mrs. Screwter had admired the oratory, the whole party descended to the drawing room, and by the time they had arrived, Miss Screwter had fully made up her mind to have a little oratory fitted up with candlesticks, and an oak devotional chair, before the Snorton girls came to see her.

"Look here, Mary, my dear," exclaimed Mr. Snorton, as the ladies passed in, "here's this chess table with a piece chipped off the leg."

"How provoking!" said Mrs. Screwter, sympathetically.

"Yes, it is," continued Mr. Snorton, "for I gave ten guineas for it not more than six months ago."

"Servants are so careless," said his wife with a sigh.

"What a fuss they make about their furniture!" whispered Maria to her mamma, as they took their seats.

"It's quite sickening, really," was the reply.

"What dreadful things omnibuses are to ride in!" continued the lady, addressing Mrs. Snorton, apropos of nothing.

"Oh, shocking, they make my head ache dreadfully," replied the lady addressed.

Ten years ago neither the Snortons nor the Screwters kept carriages, and used to be constantly riding about in omnibuses without feeling any ill effects: but it is wonderful what a difference keeping a carriage makes to one's nerves.

"Buttons" now announced Mr. and Mrs. Jonson, and family, whereupon entered a large lady, in an amplitude of satin, the Mamma Jonson; a fat mass of pomposity, the Papa Jonson; two fair girls with perked-up noses, corkscrew ringlets, and stays that creaked when they moved, the daughters Jonson; and two fair, pink-eyed youths, with lisps and flute cases to match, the sons Jonson; both the latter looked as if they had fallen a prey to a melancholy passion of a watery nature. This family was received with considerable *empressement* by the Snortons. The party was shortly completed by the

arrival of six other persons, with nothing remarkable about them, excepting a general stiff gentility of manner, which corresponded with the rest of the company, and by the entrance of Tom, who seemed to regard all the people with a rather visible contempt.

The talk for the first quarter of an hour was pretty general: the elderly ladies chatted scandal, and dress; the papas politics, commerce, furniture, and horses; and the young gentlemen and juvenile ladies congregated together, and gossipped weak nothings. The two Jonson youths tried to talk to Thomas Snorton, but he horrified them by his vulgarity, and shocked them by Oxford stories, so that they afterwards told their sisters they thought him a "wewy wude young man." The common-place topics were soon exhausted, and a silence ensued.

"Come, my dears, can't you sing something?" asked Mrs. Snorton of her daughters.

"I'm afraid not, mamma," replied Martha.

"Oh, do try, there's a dear," persuaded Miss Screwter.

"Well, Jane dear, shall we try?" said Martha, "but I'm so very hoarse."

"And I hav'nt sung for a long time," added Jane, who, we know, was practising duets with her sister, for three hours the day before.

"Oh, I am sure you will sing very nicely," lisped the eldest son Jonson, smiling with mild vacancy.

"How very stupid of mamma to ask us before dinner," remarked one of the sisters to the other in an under-tone, as they sat down to the piano and sang and played with a great deal of vigour, and very loud voices.

"Beautiful!" said Miss Screwter, when it was finished, although she had been whispering just before to her papa, that the Snorton girls sang like ravens.

"Thank you, thank you," echoed the company in general, most of them looking as if they were glad it was over. After a few more remarks on singing, there was another pause.

"Don't you think you could play a quartet?" suggested Mrs. Jonson to her children.

"Oh no!" they all exclaimed, in horror at the idea.

"My lips are so dry," suggested the eldest son.

"And we haven't any music," said his brother

"Oh yes, we have," said the papa triumphantly, "I brought it myself."

The two Misses Snorton requested them to try, and after a great deal of pressing and tootling of the flutes, the four commenced and went through about ten pages, to the infinite gratification of the company, especially to Tom Snorton, who went to sleep very comfortably. When it was over, every one was "delighted," and thanks poured in upon the performers from all sides. But the excitement this called forth, soon quieted down, and another long awful pause ensued. The ideas of all the party were exhausted, and every one felt that the room was rather chilly.

"So, my dear," said Mr. Snorton, at last taking up a card from the tray on the table, "I see Lady Brown has called on you again." He looked round the room with an air of triumph, to see the effect of this remark.

"Why, papa," said little James, "you know you asked the same question when the Pikes were here last week."

Mr. Snorton grew very red in the face, his wife looked daggers at the little monster, and the rest

of the company stored up the fact for future occasions. Fortunately for all present, Buttons at this moment announced dinner.

"Take my arm, ma'am," said Mr. Snorton to Mrs. Jonson; "gentlemen, will you hand the other ladies down?" After a little shuffling about the party was sorted in pairs, and had just quitted the room when a loud ring was heard at the visitors' bell, and upon the junior partner reaching the foot of the stairs, he was confronted by Mr. John Tripples.

"What do you want, sir?" Snorton asked with a lofty air.

"To speak to you, if you please, instantly," replied Jack hurriedly.

"Wait, sir, don't you see I'm engaged?" rejoined Snorton in a dignified tone, and passing by Tripples he entered the dining-room.

"Excuse me, will you, please?" Snorton said to his guests; "you see I have not even Christmas Day free from business: that Scandinavian loan again, I suppose." He quitted the room.

"Well, sir, what do you want, eh?" he said to Jack.

"Merely to tell you, sir—" Jack brought his ear

close to Mr. Snorton's and whispered a few words: the junior partner turned pale and clung to the bannisters for support.

"What *is* to be done?" he inquired.

"Why sir, the only thing is for you to go down to Sir Fograss at once."

"I will, yes, that 's the only course to pursue," was the reply, and Mr. Snorton paused a moment to collect his scattered thoughts.

"Here, John," he shouted sharply to Buttons, "tell your mistress I wish to see her." The boy entered the dining-room, and Mrs. Snorton came out.

"What is the matter, my dear?" said she.

"Nothing, nothing, but business of a particular nature requires me to go down to Fograss Court at once: you must excuse my absence to our visitors. I shall, perhaps, be back to-night;" and without saying another word he wished his astonished wife good-bye and quitted the house in Jack's cab, hurrying back to the hall for his hat and great coat, which in the excitement of the moment he had nearly started without.

The two were now driven rapidly towards

the London Bridge terminus: they conversed earnestly throughout the ride, and when they reached the station Mr. Snorton found a train just about to depart; he took a first-class ticket, and after saying a few final words to Jack entered the carriage, and was speedily being rapidly borne towards Fograss Court, and as he was whirled along, the black clouds gradually overcast the sky, and the wind made a plaintive Eolian harp of the wires of the electric telegraph.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTMAS DAY WITH JACK TRIPPLES.

Mr. John Tripples lived in a little court very near St. Clement's church, in the Strand, and not a hundred yards from the Temple; he had resided in his present lodgings for some time past, and his landlady had never once regretted her fortune at having Jack for a tenant. It is true that he was not very regular in his hours of coming home, but he paid like clock-work, did not give much trouble, and was very kind to her children.

We have said that Jack was fast and foolish, but these faults were owing more to youth and an extreme excitability of temperament, than the fruits of a really vicious disposition. Under all his apparent carelessness and folly, Jack really possessed a good heart and a well-formed mind.

CHRISTMAS DAY WITH JACK TRIPPLES.

When young, he was left to the sole guidance of a weak, fond mother: a woman of a gentle nature, and an affection for her son amounting to idolatry; what wonder, then, if Jack soon managed to obtain his own way in most cases, and became a small despot for a time? But his conscience always reminded him of his wilful conduct, and called up many a repentant sigh and good resolve for the future. Poverty forced Jack into the world early in life; he was placed in Sir Fograss's bank; the worthy Baronet having known his father, a poor Curate, who was worked to death for ninety pounds a-year, received the son for the sake of the parent. In business, Tripples progressed rapidly; he was quick and obliging, and speedily gained the esteem of those around him, but unfortunately, as must be the case in all large mercantile houses, some of the clerks were "hail fellows well met," young harum scarum fast muffs, who were anxious to secure Jack as a companion. The glittering baits they offered were swallowed, and Tripples' good humour, ready wit, and jovial fun, soon established his reputation in this set. Jack thus

early gained experience of a life of recklessness. But already had Jack begun to pall in these amusements; he was beginning to think that chaffing a policeman was not grand; that indulging in slang phrases and singing senseless songs was not real fun; that shaking hands with prize fighters and singers at low taverns was not establishing desirable acquaintanceships. In short, he had found out that real pleasure does not consist in mad, stupid excitement, and Jack was now yearning for evenings of quiet, natural enjoyment, with friends whose companionship is not bought merely by glasses of brandy and water, but by the sympathies of the heart and the mind. Tripples had found all this out, simply because he was getting older and wiser; the excitement had ceased, and Jack now perceived that the deity he had been worshipping was a dirty doll, dressed out in glaring tinsel and trumpery finery; he was awake now, and he discovered that all the boon companions "he went about with" were mere butterflies, who, while the sun shone on him, fluttered their gaudy wings and danced around

him, but as soon as a cloud settled over him, were quite prepared to fly away as if from a plague, and hasten elsewhere to seek some one more verdant and profitable to feed on. Tripples had already seen something of the world, and his mind had now shaken off its torpor, and he looked around for one whom he could clasp by the hand, and call by the sacred name of friend.

Such was Mr. John Tripples on the morning of that Christmas we are writing of; he got up about ten and entered into his small sitting-room.

"Good morning, sir," said Mrs. Chuxem, Jack's landlady, a little woman, who was bustling about the room, with a good-humoured, smutty face, "a merry Christmas and a happy New Year to you, sir."

"Thank you, Mrs. Chuxem, the same to you, and many of them," replied Jack.

"I suppose, sir, you don't dine at home to-day," added Mrs. Chuxem. "You gentlefolk has always somewhere to go on these kind of days, and me and my family are going to dine with my sister, at Wapping.

"I wish you a pleasant day, I'm sure," said Jack, good humouredly, "but as for me, the only invitation I am likely to receive is one to dine with Duke Humphrey."

"Lor now, sir," observed Mrs. Chuxem, with astonishment, "I didn't think you visited with such like grand folk."

"Oh, I assure you he's a most hospitable nobleman," continued Jack, laughing.

"Well, sir, I am sure I wishes you a pleasant day," said Mrs. Chuxem; "I suppose you won't want anything else, sir?"

"Nothing, thank you," replied Jack.

"Good day, sir," added the little woman, and she left the room with increased awe and respect for Jack, and when she got down stairs she told the name of the nobleman he was going to dine with to her curious family, and on the morrow it was all down the court how Mr. Tripples dined with a "nobleman" on Christmas Day, to the great credit of his reputation in the little territory.

It was true that Jack had received no invitation to dinner on Christmas Day, and,

notwithstanding his gayness in talking about it to Mrs. Chuxem, he felt lonely thereat, and also melancholy when he thought of the romping and fun he enjoyed when a boy, at his home in Devonshire; he remembered, too, a Christmas Day he had once spent at Fograss Court, and all the liveliness and gaiety rose up before him; but as Sir Fograss afterwards discovered that he was falling into bad habits and mixing too freely with dangerous companions, the invitation was never repeated. The married and settled clerks in the Bank refrained from asking Jack to their houses, from the same cause; in fact it was a complete exemplification of the old adage, "give a dog a bad name," &c.

So, as we said, Jack was lonely, and the feeling materially interfered with his appetite. At breakfast he thought that the day was one of pleasure and social intercourse, and of gay, jovial meetings, and yet he was alone, a solitary devil, without a friend's house to put his nose into; so he played with his knife and fork, and bacon, and coffee, then regarded the one plate,

one cup, one knife, and one fork, with a savage expression; and then he longed to ask some one for another cup of coffee, but having no one, asked himself out loud, and was disgusted at his own voice answering, "if you please;" at that moment he would have given anything for a friend to bear him company, or even a cat or a dog to talk to.

After having finished his meal, he took up a book and tried to read, but the pages seemed full of the words, "Christmas Day, Christmas fun, Christmas dinner," so he pitched it from him in a rage. Then he poked the fire, and sought to trace something in the fantastic forms of the bright coals, but all he could make out was a large room full of company, very merry and jolly, whilst what seemed to be a figure of himself stood outside the door, and was not allowed to enter to participate in the fun. His eye now fell upon a newspaper; he took it up determined to read accounts of murders or other horrors, but the first article he pitched upon was headed "Approaching Christmas Festivities;" he dashed the paper to the floor, and paced

the room with hasty strides, feeling perfectly certain that there was a general conspiracy in the world to make him feel his lonely position. At length he lit his pipe, and cast himself into a chair, and was gradually sinking into repose, under the soothing influence of tobacco, when up through the air rose the sound of Christmas bells, gushing forth in a merry ding dong dell, ding dong dell, which upset him completely, and to add to his discomfort his eye at that moment happened to fall upon some pieces of holly Mrs. Chuxem had stuck over his looking-glass. What a mockery they seemed to him—Christmas festivity, indeed! Christmas loneliness! he pulled them down, pitched them into the fire, and laughed fiercely as they were burnt.

"Ah," he exclaimed aloud, in a towering passion, "That woman put them there to insult me, like her impudence; I'll give her warning at once, hang me if I don't."

He rushed to ring the bell, but ere he had reached it, he heard the street-door bang to, and, throwing up the window, saw Mrs. Chuxem in her very smartest attire, accompanied by

the little Chuxems, also very fine, proceeding down the court, with laughter and happiness around them; and as he saw them disappear round the corner, Jack would have given anything to make one of the humble, joyous party.

It was fine out of doors, and although the wind was piercingly cold, Tripples still kept the window open, smoking his pipe in moody desolation, and with an apparent determination to lay himself up with a bad cold; suddenly he thought he would amuse himself and astonish the passers by with smoke-filled soap bubbles; he prepared his implements and commenced, but although the bubbles were well filled, and floated gracefully to the ground, and there burst, letting tiny volumes of smoke escape, every one was too much intent upon his own thoughts to heed them, so, after a short trial, Jack desisted in despair, and shutting down the window, fell into a reverie, feeling perfectly convinced that he was the only person *alone* on Christmas Day, every one else had somewhere to go; he paced the room with quick short strides; he next went to his door to listen if there was any one besides himself in the house, but a

perfect silence reigned; he shouted down stairs, but the echo of his own voice mocked him in reply. He returned to his room, and began walking backwards and forwards again; at last the dreadful feeling of loneliness produced such a nervous iritability that he could bear it no longer, so he plunged into his great coat, and banging on his hat, rushed down stairs, out of doors, and speedily quitted the quiet court for the bustling Strand.

The body may walk through crowded streets and yet the mind feel lonely, so it was with Jack; he was surrounded by hundreds of his fellow-creatures, but he felt that he was a solitary unconnected being. The Strand was unusually lively, cabs rattled along with rapidity, wending their way as cabs always do on Christmas Days, to savage out-regions, carrying happy living loads to beef and pudding; omnibuses rolled along, taking smiling friends and relatives to other smiling friends and relatives. The Church doors had notices up about Christmas distributions of food to the poor, but Jack felt that there was no one to bestow a scrap of

sympathy on him. Gigantic posters on the walls told of Christmas sociabilities: Parents were requested, in every coloured letters, to take their children to all sorts of amusements, from the scientific Polytechnic to the unscientific Pantomime. Insinuating tradespeople headed their bills with "Christmas Presents;" weekly newspapers told of Christmas double numbers, and booksellers threw out baits for buyers of Christmas Books. It was every where, Christmas! Christmas! and Christmas! and Jack had got quite enough of it, so he turned into a little quiet street to avoid the persecuting reminders of his loneliness; but even in the narrowest and quietest by-ways he was destined to be vexed by it, for about three yards down the street into which he had plunged, he was arrested by a flaming pictorial placard, consisting of a highly-coloured engraving, representing a very fat merry gentleman, an equally fat merry lady, and a number of almost equally fat chirping children sitting round a dinner table, all laughing, and showing very large white tusks, with a plump servant bringing in a very large plum pudding, at the enormous

size of which the aforesaid fat gentleman seemed to be expressing his surprise to his wife, to which she was, to all appearance, replying in a triumphant manner, that the great size was all owing to her selling old rags to Jinks, who gives a half-penny a pound more for them than any other rag merchant in London, at which the fat gentleman is very well satisfied, and lauds his wife's economy, and all parties seem perfectly contented with themselves, the world in general, and this special rag dealer in particular.

We are sorry to say that Jack did not appreciate this work of art, but muttering some thing about the ———, left the street and returned to the Strand. Every thing around him made him feel his solitary position. Crowds of people hurried along with merry, good-humoured faces; all but Jack seemed to have some settled plan in view; even solitary walkers, like himself, went briskly along, with faces which plainly said, "I am going out to dinner, and I mean to have a pleasant day of it." An omnibus passed, and a fellow-clerk nodded, and smiled at Jack, and pointed him out to a nice pretty girl he had with

him, and they both smiled radiantly, which made Tripples very savage.

He would have given anything for the shops to be open, so that he might look into them, and take his eyes off the pleasing crowd, but even the chemists had shut up, and when he did reach one with the shutters down from the plate glass of the door all he saw was a reflected glimpse of his own miserable face, making him more wretched than ever.

It was now about one o'clock; respectable tradespeople and shopmen looked at their watches, and hurried towards their homes—poor people surrounded by little chubby children, escorted the Christmas dinner home with great glee and much laughter. Jack didn't feel in the least hungry, but he thought that dinner would help to pass away the time, and he was turning into a dining place when he discovered that he had left his purse at home. He was hastening back to fetch it, when a man and a little girl overtook him, and the former touched his hat as he passed. It was the porter, Poundaweek, and his daughter. Jack turned, for he felt an almost irresistible desire to exchange a few kind words with them.

"Good morning," said Jack, as he came up with them.

"I wish you a good day, sir," said Poundaweek, with dignity; "I also wish you, as the saying goes, sir, a merry Christmas."

The words jarred upon Jack's ears.

"I apprehend, sir, that you intend taking your festive meal with friends?"

"No," replied Jack, almost fiercely, "I am alone, every one else seems going somewhere but myself,—I have no where to go to."

"Indeed sir! well, that surprises me," said Poundaweek. "Now, sir, me and my family are going to dine at home with my cousins, and we mean to be very merry."

Jack was tempted to throttle the man for the remark.

"I shall dine at my usual place, of course I shall, why shouldn't I, eh?" added Jack, glaring furiously at the pair.

"I am sure, sir, that is beyond my personal comprehension," replied Poundaweek.

"Oh, I'll have a glorious day of it, I shall dine alone, so merry, so sociable," said Jack, with

passionate utterance, and making use of a bi-syllabic expression which we will not record.

"Sorry to hear you have no one to dine with, I can assure you, sir," added Poundaweek; "I suppose you intend to take your meals at the usual place in Fleet Street?"

"Yes, in solitary state," said Jack, melancholily; "I shall go at once, for I must do something to get through this stupid day."

By this time they had arrived at the corner of Jack's court, and wishing each other "good day," the latter turned down to his home.

"Home!" said Jack to himself, "*Home*, what a mockery of the name! a miserable, cold, inhospitable room, devoid of every sort of comfort. I'll go to Australia to-morrow, I'll not stop in this large city in solitude! hang me if I do."

He opened the door, and closed it with a bang: the house was empty, and his footsteps produced an echo as he slowly ascended the stairs to his second floor; the fire in his room had gone out, and the apartment was cold and dreary; Jack cast himself into a chair and sat freezing and meditating for half-an-hour; at last he slowly rose, washed himself in icy water, and with a

very blue nose, and frozen hands, pulled on his great coat, and sauntered forth to enjoy his lonely meal.

The streets were now a little clearer; from gratings in the pavement ascended savoury odours, and occasionally a burst of laughter broke upon Tripples' ears. At last he reached the tavern where he usually dined, and turned in. The coffee room was deserted, the waiters even were absent, and the fire in the grate smouldered away without throwing out a particle of heat.

"Here's a nice cheerful place to dine at on a Christmas Day!" said Jack, as he rang the bell violently. A waiter entered, with a very red face, and a mouth full of dinner.

"Dinner," said Jack, sharply.

"Dinner, sir?" asked the waiter surprised.

"Well, I suppose I may dine somewhere!" exclaimed Jack, fiercely, "you've no objection to that, have you, eh?"

"Oh, no, sir, none in the least," replied the waiter.

"Don't be impudent," almost shouted Jack; "what have you got?"

"Why, you see, sir," answered the waiter, quite confidentially, "we don't cook much to-day, sir; we 're uncommon flat a-Christmas-days, and such like; but we 've a fine turkey in cut."

"Well, then, bring me some."

"Yes, sir; and a little bread-sauce, and a nice broccoli and potato, eh, sir?"

"Yes, yes; anything, of course," replied Jack, petulantly.

The waiter, wondering much at Jack's manner, put some coals on the fire, whisked an imaginary crumb off a table-cloth, and quitted the room. Our hero sat before the fire, watching it intently; the monotonous ticking of an old clock alone broke the silence. After a while Jack got calmer; he remembered that it was his own folly alone that left him so desolate, and he resolved to amend his ways for the future. Rather lighter in heart, he waited patiently for his dinner. At length he recollected that an old doctor, a family friend, now living in London, had, two years back, given him a general invitation for Christmas Days, which Tripples had quite for-

gotten until now. Here was "corn in Egypt." After all, then, he should be able to finish the evening in a decent house, and in a sociable manner. All his disgust at Christmas Day vanished, and he revoked his determination about going to Australia. Upon this joyous discovery Jack indulged in a verse of a song, poked the fire in the ribs, and nodded and winked at himself in the dusty glass over the fire-place; and, when the waiter entered with the dinner, Jack astonished him by performing an operatic evolution, and slapping him on the back, to the material derangement of that worthy's breathing organs.

"Now, sir,—don't," said the waiter.

"No, I won't," replied Jack, laughing.

"What would you like to drink, sir?"

"Bring me a pint of sherry, and have some punch ready for after dinner; I mean to be merry to-day. Hurrah!"

The waiter left the room astonished at the change in Jack's manner, and having not a few doubts respecting his sanity. Tripples, after two or three gyrations, nodded familiarly to an

old gentleman going by, thereby puzzling him exceedingly; and with a happy, jolly-looking face, sat down to the table. As soon as the steam of the dinner ascended to his nostrils, he discovered that he was very hungry, or, as he himself expressed it, "tremendously hungry." Deliberately he helped himself to turkey; carefully did he deposit the various adjuncts on the plate, and he was just adding some salt, when a person ran past the window.

"Somebody in a hurry," said Jack, as he put a piece of turkey on his fork, and was about to raise it to his mouth, when the waiter, who entered the room with the sherry, was nearly overturned by the flying entrance of Poundaweek.

"Hallo, Poundaweek!" exclaimed Jack, in bewilderment; "what the deuce brings you here in such a hurry?"

The porter came close to Jack, and whispered a few words in his ear, and Tripples let fall his knife and fork.

"The devil!" said Jack, starting from his seat; "but are you sure, man?"

"Certain, sir; I have been with the——" (here Poundaweek dropped his voice again to a whisper

as he observed the waiter was listening intently.)

"The three black ones?" inquired Jack, in a tremulous voice.

"Yes, sir," replied Poundaweek.

"Well, now, what is to be done?" asked Tripples, with an amazed air, and a desponding shake of the head.

"They tell me down there," answered Poundaweek, pointing towards the city, "that you had better go to Mr. Snorton's at once, sir."

"Of course, of course; that is what I must do," said Jack, in a hurried voice. "Here, waiter," he added, "I shall not want my dinner —I'll pay to-morrow;" and putting on his great coat, he went out with Poundaweek; leaving the waiter in a great state of bewilderment and ungratified curiosity. He, however, relieved his mind by informing himself, "That that 'ere was a pretty go;" consoled himself by drinking two glasses of Jack's sherry, and then removed the untasted dinner.

As soon as Poundaweek and Tripples gained the street, the latter hailed the first "Hansom" they met, and, after agreeing to meet the former in the City, he desired the man to drive to Clapham

The cab rattled over Blackfriars-Bridge, bearing Jack, looking perplexed and feeling doleful. The Elephant and Castle was soon gained; the turnpike-gate at Kennington was paid and cleared; and at about three he pulled up the cab at The Lodge. We have already described his interview with the junior partner, and how the two proceeded to the London Bridge Station.

As soon as Mr. Snorton left the cab, Tripples desired the man to proceed to the Bank; and as he drove across London Bridge, Jack looked down the Pool, and saw the bank of black clouds extending sluggishly along the east, while the wind raised a chilly ripple on the river, whose dark waters streamed along in muddy cheerlessness.

CHRISTMAS DAY WITH TIMOTHY POUNDAWEEK.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTMAS DAY WITH TIMOTHY POUNDAWEEK.

We have taken our readers to the ground-floor at Fograss Court, to the first at Snorton's House, and to the second in Jack's lodgings near the Temple; we have now to carry them to the third-floor in a little street, very close to Goodman's Fields, the residence of Mr. Timothy Poundaweek.

The two rooms occupied by the head porter were at the top of a large old fashioned house, once, perhaps, the residence of wealth, but now let out at trifling rents, in a series of apartments, to persons of Poundaweek's class. The sitting-room was very large and low-roofed, the walls were whitewashed, and ornamented here and there with cheap coloured varnished prints, a Christmas piece, the production of Timothy when

a boy, several likenesses of the family cut out in black paper by an itinerant artist, and all so much alike that visitors generally mistook the portrait of the youngest son, a child of five years of age for the father, and lastly, a water-colour drawing of Poundaweek's parent as beadle, resplendent in clerical serving livery, grasping the staff of office, and standing in an attitude calculated to strike awe into the breasts of charity-boys and free-seat juvenile attendants. The room contained several deal chairs, scrubbed very white, two old mahogany tables, and three flower-pots of sickly geraniums or rather crooked sticks, that in the summer put out three or four leaves each, and a couple of buds which never burst into flower.

Poundaweek's family consisted of his wife and five children. The former was a florid, stout woman, very neat, industrious, and irritable, with a most determined passion for scrubbing,—that seemed her *mission;* she was never easy unless cleaning or scouring, and the indulgence of this passion kept the floor of the room in a perpetual state of damp cleanliness. Master

Timothy Poundaweek, the eldest son, was in a a charity-school. He was a true London boy, and caused his father much trouble; his clothes never seemed large enough for him, and the trousers had an obstinate disinclination to meet either his boots or his jacket. He was an excellent whistler, and a regular dabster at all games of chance. His pockets contained perfect treasures, consisting of buttons, dumps, odd pieces of string, wonderful old knives, and a pair of the largest bones in the parish. If sent on an errand, it was quite uncertain when he would return, as holding horses, assisting in rows, annoying watchmakers at their work by flattening his nose against the windows and going through a series of pantomimic signs, accompanying street organs with his bones, doing wheels by the side of omnibuses, chaffing genteel swells by politely inquiring as to who 's their tailor, and terrifing old ladies by yelling horribly when they crossed the roads, varied the monotony of his procedure, and increased the time of his absence. The remaining four children were in no way different from others of their class; they had a

wholesome horror of washing and nose-wiping, and thought their mother a perfect tyrant for insisting upon their performing those needless operations; they delighted in playing with mud and dirt, always formed an amused, if not a paying portion of the audience to Punch and bounding street acrobats, and the second boy was constantly enlivening home with popular street chants and imitations of niggers.

It was ten o'clock on Christmas morning. Breakfast had long been finished. The eldest boy had gone to school and church, furnished with a few halfpence given him by his father, and from which he had determined to extract a little amusement during the sermon; the two other boys had furtively stolen forth to play in the streets; the two girls were assisting their mother in the domestic affairs, whilst Poundaweek was reading a book.

"Drat yer, children," exclaimed Mrs. Poundaweek, with a scarlet face, and a heavy saucepan of water in her hands, "yer allays in the way. Murry Hann, you take your fingers out of them plums. I'll give yer a slap when I catch yer.

Now you Mariar, are you a-washing them greens?"

"Now children," said Poundaweek, looking up from his book, "mind what your mother says. *I* always minded what *my* mother said."

"Yes, father," said both children at once.

"What's the good of you a-saying, *Yes*, father, if you don't mind what's a-said to yer?" exclaimed Mrs. Poundaweek.

"No, mother," said Murry Hann; upon which remark Mrs. Poundaweek made a dash at her, and, administering a sound box on the ears, sent the unfortunate Murry Hann off crying.

Mrs. Poundaweek certainly was in her glory; she had a mighty deal of cooking to do, a large quantity of cleaning, and a great mass of important business to transact. She bustled here and there, scolded the children, thumped the fire, put on saucepans which let out very pleasant odours when she peeped into them to see how the contents were going on; a goose, too, was stuffed, and Mrs. Poundaweek shed briny tears over the onions; the *paterfamilias* was even forced to throw aside his book and

his dignity, to dust glasses and plates, and make himself generally useful. At last he dived into cupboards, and brought out two black bottles, which he uncorked, and smelt the contents with the nose of a connoisseur, and then he brought out a tumbler, and, pouring a little white fluid from one of the bottles, offered it to his better half.

"Now don't, Poundaweek," said Mrs. P., "you knows I never do; I can't a-bear spirits of a morning."

"But recollect, Mrs. P., it's Christmas," persuaded her husband; "come, just a little drop."

"You should'nt ask me," said Mrs. Poundaweek, taking the glass; after a curious grimace she drank up the contents, and during the feat her husband indulged in a series of winks at the wall, quite unbecoming the son of a beadle, and a head messenger in a wealthy banking house. "Now, P.," said his wife, gasping after she had swallowed the liquid, "come, you have some."

"Oh, yes. Here 's a merry Christmas to us all," said Poundaweek; and then he drank, and

afterwards poked his wife in the ribs, and actually hauled her under a piece of mistletoe, at which she said, "Don't be a fool, Timothy." But, nevertheless, they kissed each other with a loud smacking noise, something like a cracker going off; then they laughed, and the children shouted and jumped about with great glee, and there was a great deal of connubial and domestic felicity in the establishment.

"Now P.," said his wife, when the joy had subsided, "help me to put the goose down."

"Yes, dear," he replied, and, quite forgetting all about his dignity, attended to the cookery.

"My!" he continued, "it's a fine goose, and you only gave five shillings for it; what a good marketer you are!"

"Well, if I ham, P.," responded his spouse, smiling with a well-satisfied air, "if I ham, you deserves it, for you be a good 'usband, and a good father."

"I try to be, I try to be, Mrs. P.," replied the husband, "and to-day we will have a jolly day of it, won't we?"

"Yes P. But you must go out now; I wants

to do some cleaning, and you'll be in the way. Take Murry Hann with you, there's a good old man."

"I will," replied Poundaweek. "Here, Mary Ann, put on your bonnet and shawl, I mean to take you out for a walk."

"Yes, father," replied the child, joyfully.

The pair were soon equipped, and sallied forth. As soon as they had left, Mrs. Poundaweek seized a pail of water, and flopped down on her knees to pursue her favourite employment, while "Mariar" watched the goose, and indulged herself with some of the apples from the sauce, when her mother was not looking.

Poundaweek and his daughter wended their way towards the Minories, to reach which they had to traverse a number of small courts and by-streets; into this labyrinth they plunged. Mr. Poundaweek was very important and impressive when out, and he puzzled his child sadly by entering into the nature of the British constitution, and the superiority of the English over every other nation in the world; he was just explaining to her how, if London were to

be invaded, the Lord Mayor would throw himself into the Tower, and blow up the foreign fleet, as it proceeded up the Thames,—when, upon turning a corner, they came into violent contact with two men, who were running rapidly, one carrying something in a bundle.

"Now then, where are ye a-coming too?" said the foremost of the men, a dogged-faced individual.

"Why can't *you* mind?" replied Poundaweek, with great dignity, "*you* have nearly knocked over my little girl, I assure you."

"'Old hard hold 'un, none o' yer jaw now, it won't do," added the man, in a voice betokening a pugilistic inclination.

"Come along, Bill," said the other, pulling his comrade's arm, "leave the old cove alone, can't you, you precious fool?"

"Blow him, I'll give him something he don't like," said the first speaker, shaking his fist angrily.

"My good man, if a policeman was in sight, I would give you into custody," said Poundaweek, with ireful dignity.

"Would you, you hold methodist cove?" replied the man.

"Now Bill, you fool, are you a-coming?" said his companion, pushing him on, and then he added to Poundaweek, "all serene guv 'nor," and before the head messenger could make a reply, the pair had turned the corner, and were lost to view.

Poundaweek, muttering something about "Police and respectable inhabitants," took his little girl's hand, and proceeded on his way. They soon emerged into the Minories, and as the cold wind blew down the street with exhilarating breeziness, Poundaweek forgot the men and the collision. They shaped their course west, as Poundaweek wished to show his daughter the beauties of the aristocratic portion of London, which, according to his notion, commenced at Fleet-street, and terminated at Charing-cross. "There, Mary Ann, that 's the Bank of England, and that 's the Mansion House, where the Lord Mayor resides. He 's the King of the City, you know," said Poundaweek, pointing the buildings out to his child's notice.

"Oh, father," asked the child, "does the Lord Mayor have the men in armour always a-waiting on him'?"

"I don't know, child; don't ask questions," he replied.

"Yes, but does he?" continued the little girl, with the pertinacity peculiar to children, "you know every thing, father, and you ought to know that."

"Well, I dare say he does," answered the father, mollified at this tribute paid to his knowledge. "There 's *Gild* hall," he added.

"Where, father; oh, where?"

"Why, at the end of that street," said Poundaweek, pointing it out.

"Why, father, it ain 't gilded."

"And who said it was, you stupid, tiresome child. It 's nothing to do with gilt, but it has to do with trade, and law, and the Lord Mayor's show."

"Oh!" said the child; and the two proceeded a little distance in silence.

"That big building 's St. Paul's; it was built by Wren," said Mr. Poundaweek, in a

pompous, learned tone of voice. "It 's a Cathedral."

"I thought a wren was a bird, and only built nests—what 's a Cathedral, father?"

"What a very silly girl you are to make such stupid observations: I 'll take you home if you are not quiet. A Cathedral 's a large church: but don't ask questions," remarked Poundaweek sharply.

Thereupon the little girl was silent, and the pair walked on up Fleet Street, and along the Strand to Charing Cross, Poundaweek pointing out the principal buildings, and telling their histories and antiquities in a manner that would surprise our friend, the author of the "Handbook of London."

At Somerset House he told the old story of the watch in the wall. At Trafalgar Square he gave a sketch of the life of Nelson, and entered upon the use of a National Gallery, but he could not contrive to convince his daughter that it was not connected with the "National Schools," and she went home with the full conviction that the R.A. 's painted the instructive pictures for those popular educational establishments.

Mr. Poundaweek was now reminded by his stomach of the dinner at home, and they pursued their course homewards ; with the exception of meeting Tripples, nothing particular occurred, and it was nearly two when they rejoined their expectant family.

The room was redolent of goose and onions, the table-cloth was spread on the large centre table, mighty cans of beer ornamented the dresser, and the goose reposed upon a dish before the fire, looking temptingly brown. All the children were gathered together, and ranged round the room, in their Sunday clothes, and with their demurest faces. Mrs. Poundaweek was resplendent in a print gown of many colours, and her jolly face matched admirably with the red bows in her cap. She was in excellent humour, for the goose and dinner were done to a turn.

"Ah, you 're come back," said she to her husband ; "have you had a nice walk?"

"Yes, thank you," replied Timothy, "but Mary Anne 's very troublesome, she will ask questions."

"Oh, you wicked child, how can you worrit your father when he gives you a treat by taking

you for a walk?" said the mother fiercely, looking ready to pounce upon the child.

"Never mind, mother," added Poundaweek, in a conciliatory voice, "it's Christmas Day you know, so don't let's have any crossness." Then, turning to the children, he added, "Now boys and girls, mind you behave well, and don't quarrel with each other; recollect you never heard me say *I* quarrelled with my brothers and sisters; so be good children."

"Yes, father, we will," chorussed the four voices.

"Mind you are, now," added the mother, sharply. "Mariar, wipe your nose; Timothy, I'll box your ears if you goes on shuffling your feet about."

"Now, mother, I declare it's past dinner time," remarked Poundaweek, "and Tom and them hav'nt come yet."

"They will be sure to come all right; they be never very late," was the answer.

As if to corroborate the statement of punctuality made by Mrs. P., the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs was heard, and immediately the door was thrown open, and in came

Mrs. Poundaweek's brother Tom, his wife, their four children, Tom's wife's sister, and *her* young man, all looking very jolly and happy. There was a great deal of hand-shaking and merry Christmas wishing by every one to every one else, and not a little joking about the piece of mistletoe. The younger Poundaweeks were very merry, too, with their little cousins; and, like many other young children, immediately told them the exact quantity of every article they were going to have for dinner, including the weight of the goose, and the size of the plum pudding. And then there was taking off bonnets, and poking ringlets into shape on the part of the ladies, while the gentlemen had just a thimbleful of gin to keep the cold out.

Then Poundaweek suggested dinner, and his wife went to get it up; whereupon her two female guests said, "Let me help you, Mrs. P.," and all three proceeded to shovel out bushels of potatoes, enormous heads of broccoli, and great masses of apple sauce; and, when everything was put upon the table, there was a deal of rubbing of hands, and Tom said that he

"thought they would soon make the goose look foolish," at which every body laughed, and Mrs. Tom looked at him with intense admiration and a triumphant air, as much as to say, "There, what do you think of that; isn't he clever?" and then there was a great clamping of feet, and dragging of chairs to the table, as the company seated themselves, and the two mothers administered a little salutary correction to their respective offspring, and Tom made a sly joke about his wife's sister and her young man sitting together, which made the former blush, and the latter look excessively sheepish.

Poundaweek sharpened his knife, said a short grace, and, with a preliminary flourish of the weapon, was going to commence cutting up, when suddenly he exclaimed, "Gracious goodness!"

"What 's the matter, Timothy?" asked Tom.

"I 've forgotten," replied Poundaweek.

"Not the tobacco, I hope," added Tom.

"How very stupid!" continued Poundaweek.

"What 's the matter, Timothy, what have you forgotten?" inquired his wife, in alarm.

"To post the letters for Mr. Fograss; I must go to the Bank at once."

"That will do after dinner, won't it?" asked Tom's wife.

"No that it won't, I must go at once."

"How tiresome, P.," said his wife, in a tone of vexation, "the dinner will spoil, drat it!"

"No it won't," said Tom's wife, "Timothy won't be long gone, so let's put the goose before the fire, and wait until he comes back."

"Oh, yes," said all the guests, "of course, that will do."

"Well," added Poundaweek, "I shan't be more than a quarter of an hour gone."

"All right P.," said his wife, her good humour now quite restored, and before the goose was removed from the table, Poundaweek had quitted the house.

He rapidly threaded the labyrinth of courts, and when he gained the open streets, ran along as fast as his legs would carry him, and in less than ten minutes reached the Banking House. He asked the servant who let him in, for any letters for Mr. Fograss; these he obtained and entered

the office for the purpose of putting them into an envelope: having directed and sealed them, he threw the lucifer-match on the ground a-light, and, as he looked to see if the flame had gone out, his eye fell upon a key lying on the floor.

"Hallo, what's this?" he exclaimed, picking it up; "why it looks very like one of our safe keys; but no, it can't be, they are all locked up in the little iron box."

He thought a moment, and looked at the key attentively, and gradually a suspicion crossed his mind that all was not quite right, so lighting a candle, he descended to see if the door of the strong room was locked. He got down stairs, and found it closed, but on trying it the heavy iron door slowly yielded to his efforts, and disclosed to his astonished eyes a mass of account books scattered over the floor in great confusion. "The place has been robbed!" he exclaimed, recoiling in horror; "whatever is to be done! I'll go and call the servants in the house." He turned to proceed up stairs, but knowing that the safe containing the bank notes, acceptances, and

other valuable property, was at the farther end of the room, he went back to see if it had been touched; on arriving at it and trying the door, to his great relief, he found that it was locked, and was rejoicing at this discovery, when he remembered the key he had picked up, which in his excitement he had already forgotten; falteringly he inserted it in the key-hole, and to his grief he found that it unlocked the door, which he opened, and discovered the contents to be gone! His brain reeled, and for a moment he was paralyzed by fear. What was to be done? the three large banking cases that were abstracted, he knew contained all the valuable property in the Bank, such as mortgage deeds, acceptances, and bank notes, to a considerable amount; the little drawer, also, containing the gold was empty. As soon as he could collect his thoughts, after this astounding discovery, he reflected upon the steps to be taken, and after pondering for a few minutes, determined to communicate with the police authorities on the subject, but first he would ascertain if the head clerk of the establishment, who lived on the premises, was at home.

He went up stairs, and calling for the servant, sked,—

"Is Mr. Tollinson at home?"

"No, he is gone into the country, and will not be back until to-morrow," was the reply.

Timothy paused a moment to consider whether he should at once tell the servant of the robbery, or consult with the police: he determined upon the latter course. Assuming as careless a voice as he possibly could, he inquired:

"Has any one called to-day on business?"

"No," replied the domestic, "no one has called to-day at all, excepting a man with a hamper."

"Did you leave him in the passage alone," inquired Poundaweek.

"Yes, I went up stairs to get the money," answered the domestic.

"And you found him here when you returned?"

"Yes, but why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing; good day!" said Poundaweek, abruptly quitting the house.

A light had flashed across him, that the man with the hamper had some connexion with the

robbery. Dinner, and every other domestic concern, was now entirely forgotten, and, hastening across the street, he rapidly gained the Mansion House. On entering the office, he found an Inspector, two or three Detectives, and some officers, lounging about; to the former Poundaweek briefly detailed his discovery of the robbery. After a little consultation, two officers were despatched to the Banking House with Poundaweek, which they searched most thoroughly, but could discover nothing that could throw a light on the mystery.

"You say no one has been here to-day?" asked one of the officers of the servant.

"Only the man with the hamper," replied the domestic, who was horribly alarmed at the affair.

"Let 's see the hamper," said the other officer.

"It 's up stairs," replied the maid, "will you come up, or shall I bring it down?"

"Oh, we will go up," replied the officer, and up stairs the whole party went.

The hamper, upon being cut open, was found to contain, much to the astonishment of every

one but the two officers, merely a collection of dry rubbish.

"Whew!" whistled one of the officers.

"That 's it, is it?" said the other.

"I felt certain that hamper had something to do with it," exclaimed Timothy, triumphantly.

"You say you left the man in the passage while you went up stairs?" inquired one of the officers of the servant.

"Yes, I did, and he was there when I came back," replied the frightened woman.

"Of course he was," said the officer, "and while you fetched *his* money, he no doubt, introduced a man into the Bank, who fetched away the Bank's money," added he, and the other officer laughed at the little professional joke.

"What kind of a man was it that left the hamper?" asked Poundaweek.

"A tall dark man, with whiskers, dressed as a carman. He asked me to sign a book for the hamper, which I did with a pencil," replied the servant.

"Was there anything peculiar about his appearance?" inquired one of the officers.

"Nothing that I noticed," was the servant's reply; "stop, though; he squinted with one eye, and two of his fingers were bent down; I saw that as he shut up the book I had put my name in."

"I say, John," said one of the officers, "if Joe Harris had not been sent across the herring-pond, I should say it was him."

"Well, now there is nothing else to be learnt, we had better go back to the Mansion House," added the other, "and Mr. Poundaweek, and the servant, and the hamper, had better go with us."

The party returned to the Mansion House, and after some further consultation, the Inspector suggested the advisability of communicating immediately with the partners of the Bank, respecting the robbery. Timothy agreed to this, and volunteered to start off at once to Mr. Snorton's house, but, upon second consideration, and after taking the Inspector's advice, he thought it would be as well to communicate with that gentleman through some more influential personage. But unfortunately a new difficulty presented itself; Poundaweek, now

in a high state of mental excitement, could not, for the life of him, remember the residences of any of the clerks, and, after some little effort of memory, he gave up the attempt in despair, and agreed to go himself to Clapham; and he was leaving the office to proceed thither, when he suddenly remembered his meeting with Tripples, and how Jack had told him that he intended dining in Fleet-street. Timothy knew the place well, for he once overheard Tripples telling some one the name of the house. So off he started, running quickly through the streets, and found Jack. We have described this interview, and how the latter started for the junior partner's house, after which Poundaweek returned to the City.

When Timothy got back to the Mansion House, nothing further had, as yet, been discovered; Detectives, however, had been despatched to various places, such as Gray's Inn Lane, St. Giles's, the Mint in the Borough, and other sanctuaries of crime and iniquity in this vast metropolis. Poundaweek, finding that his services were not required for the present,

and knowing that his friends at home would be uneasy at his prolonged absence, determined to go and tell them the misfortune that had occurred, and afterwards return to meet Jack, as agreed.

With what far different feelings did Poundaweek retrace his steps through the streets he had lately bounded so cheerfully along: then he was free from care and anxiety, and looking forward to spending a day of unclouded domestic happiness with his family; now he felt uneasy, oppressed, and harrassed, and contemplated the remainder of the day with no pleasurable emotions. He walked along with a slow, lagging gait, wishing most heartily that the great Christmas holiday had been left to him in undisturbed enjoyment. He gained the Minories, and turned down from it into the labyrinth of little courts and narrow streets we have before mentioned. As he was proceeding through one of the narrowest and dirtiest, with the words "ROBBERY, ROBBERY, ROBBERY" ringing through his brain, he suddenly heard an echo proceed from a very dirty, dismal house, and

"*Robbery*" fell upon his outward, as well as his mental, ears. He started, and paused instinctively, and, hearing other voices proceeding from the ground-floor of the house, drew himself close to the wall, near the window, in the hope of catching something that might explain the word he had heard pronounced. He listened for two or three minutes, but his straining ears were only gratified by the sound of hoarse grating whispers, and low, chuckling laughter. After a while he determined to leave the place, —perhaps the "*robbery*" that he had heard was only himself thinking aloud, without knowing it, —so he withdrew a step or two from the wall, when a man's voice, which he thought he recognised, exclaimed, in a harsh tone,—

"So you see we 've got the swag."

Instantly and breathlessly Timothy resumed his position, and his curiosity was gratified by hearing a second speaker exclaim, "That 's all right; but how?" Here the voice sank to a whisper, and Timothy was unable to catch a single word more, but at last the first speaker said aloud,—

"The notes?"

"Yes," replied the second.

"I 'll tell you," said a third speaker, and then followed a long whispered conversation, of which Poundaweek could not catch a single word, and when it was finished a loud laugh followed, and the second speaker exclaimed, "Bravo, you 've done it well;" and then the parties appeared to quit the room.

Poundaweek stood for a moment like one under a charm. He had no doubt discovered a robbery, but was it the right one? The men certainly spoke of notes, but there were other notes in the world besides those in the Bank. He knew not what to do; should he at once seek the assistance of a policeman and force an entrance into the room, or return to the Mansion House and communicate with the parties there? After a little consideration he decided upon pursuing the latter course, so, carefully noticing the appearance of the house, he left the court and ran back to the Mansion House as fast as his legs would carry him. When he reached it he found Jack, who had just arrived, in earnest

discussion with the Inspector, and communicating to him the instructions he had received from Mr. Snorton relative to the robbery.

"I've discovered something," exclaimed Timothy, in an excited tone of voice as he entered.

"When—where—how?" asked Jack, impetuously, but before Timothy could reply he sank exhausted upon a chair.

"Get some brandy," said the Inspector; the spirit was brought and administered to Poundaweek, who soon recovered.

"Now," continued the Inspector, "what have you found out?"

Poundaweek explained to him as quickly as possible the discovery he had made.

"You certainly have discovered a robbery," observed Jack, "but whether it is ours, I cannot say."

"Yes, there is no doubt about that," added the Inspector, "and we shall therefore be justified in searching the house, and as the sooner it is done the better, no time is to be lost. My own opinion is, that you have discovered the robbery at the Bank."

"Would to God he has!" fervently ejaculated Jack.

"Do you think so?" added Poundaweek, joyfully.

"Well, I really do," replied the Inspector, "but we will soon find out."

The arrangements were promptly made, two detectives were to start for the house, and Poundaweek and Jack volunteered to accompany them. Three or four public officers were also despatched to act as a *corps de réserve*, should any resistance be attempted. The latter instantly departed, and the detectives and the others shortly followed in a cab.

As the vehicle drove rapidly along, the party agreed that Poundaweek should knock at the door, whilst the others lay concealed, ready to effect an entrance as soon as it was opened. They quickly arrived at the Minories, and, getting out of the cab, after desiring the man, who appeared to be well known to the detectives, to wait, they dived into the courts and speedily gained the one in which the house was situated. Before they reached it, they found the four

policemen who had been detached loitering about, and gave directions for two to go to each end of the court, and to come if they heard a whistle, but they were to keep themselves as much in the dark as possible to prevent suspicion on the part of any one about.

The two officers and Jack concealed themselves under an archway close at hand, while Poundaweek went forward to the door. He knocked a single rap, but no notice was taken of the summons, and after repeating it with the same ill-luck, began to think that either the house was empty, or that the men had got some suspicions of his design, and were making off another way. He repeated the summons a third time, and had let the knocker fall when the door was opened, and Timothy stood confronted with one of the men who had run against him in the morning.

"'Ullo! hold hun!" said the man, "what do you want? yer ad better—" but before he could finish his inhospitable greeting, he found himself and Poundaweek forced into the passage with three other men, and the street door instantly closed, against which the broad back

of an officer pressed heavily. The man uttered an oath, and stood with his arms folded glancing at the party with a sullen glowering expression.

"Oh, Bill Langley! it 's you, is it, my friend?" said one of the detectives, advancing; "We 've got you at last, have we? Well, we shan 't let you go again in a hurry."

"What do you want me for?" asked the man, gruffly.

"Your memory 's treacherous this morning, my dear William," replied the detective; "have you forgotten the Bank already?"

"I know nothing about that," answered the man, forgetting himself.

"So, you 've heard of it, have you?" said the officer, at which the man grew very pale.

"But it 's cold here, suppose we go into the back room, I dare say you 've got a nice fire there," continued the detective, pushing Bill before him into the room, and closely followed by the others.

"And now, my friend, we will put on these bracelets if you please, in case you should feel disposed to exercise your hands on anybody,"

said the officer, producing the handcuffs, and putting them on the wrists of the unresisting man; "and now," he said, "my companions will go and have a look round your comfortable house, while you and I have a little conversation all to ourselves."

"They won't find nothink there," said Bill, triumphantly.

"Won't they, then perhaps some of your friends may arrive with something shortly?"

"They won't be here for a month," answered Bill, doggedly.

"Well, then, we can wait, you know," replied the detective, "we are in no hurry, we rather like waiting for you gentlemen, especially in such a comfortable warm room as this is."

Jack, Poundaweek, and the other detective now commenced a strict search of the house, looking into every room, examining the contents of cupboards, and peering into every nook and corner in the dwelling; but they succeeded in finding nothing, excepting some house-breaking implements, and a bunch of skeleton keys; after this fruitless errand they returned to the back

room, and consulted with the other officer, while Bill, seeing the search had produced nothing material, grinned triumphantly.

The four determined at last to leave the place in charge of a couple of policemen, and return to the Mansion House with the man in custody.

Poundaweek and Tripples felt very much depressed in spirits, and had almost given up in despair their hopes of discovering the robbery at present, when, just as the party were preparing to quit the house, a knock was heard at the front door, hearing which, Bill was about to set up a shout of warning, but one of the detectives, perceiving his intention, quick as lightning gagged him with a handkerchief, and drawing a staff from his pocket, said, in a low voice, "If you make the least noise, I'll quiet you, I can tell you."

The other detective went to the door, and peeping through the key-hole, perceived three men, one holding a heavy-looking bundle, which he had just taken from under the cloak he was wrapped in. The officer returned to the room, and rapidly directed that Jack should open the

door, standing well behind it, that he should speak in a gruff voice if the men addressed him, and after letting them in, should summon the other officers, bring two in, and tell the rest to remain at hand outside, while he and Poundaweek went into the front room. The knocking at the door was repeated during this rapid conversation, and curses were vented on Mr. William Langley's eyes, ears, and body generally. At last Jack opened the door, and the three men entered, one exclaiming, "Well Bill, what a fool you are, to keep us waiting."

"All right," said Jack, gruffly.

"'Ullo, is that you, Bob, where 's Bill?"

"Hall serene hin the front room," added Jack.

The three, fortunately without looking at Tripples, went into the room, while the latter hailed the policemen, two of whom immediately entered the passage.

"Here we are, Bill," said one of the three men,

"Yes, here we are!" exclaimed the officer, pouncing upon the man with the bundle, and

wresting it from his grasp. With a cry of pain and an oath, the fellow sprung fiercely upon the officer, and, assisted by one of the others, would speedily have regained the bundle, had not Jack and one of the policemen, who had by this time made his appearance, seized hold of them, and forced them from the breathless detective. Meanwhile, Poundaweek had tackled the other man, but he freed himself from Timothy's grasp, threw open the window, and jumped out—into the arms of a policeman. The three ruffians were speedily handcuffed, and taken into the back room, where, to their astonishment, they beheld Bill Langley already in custody.

"What!" exclaimed the officer in charge of the latter, as the first of the other three entered; "What, Joe Harris home again! why I thought you were done for."

"No, here I am, ——— it," said the man.

"Yes, here you are, but we mean soon to be quit of you again;" then turning to the policeman, he said, "now lads, off with them; and, before the crowd which had begun to collect outside had formed any notion respecting the

whole affair, so rapidly was it effected, they were gratified by seeing the four men taken off in charge of the police.

Poundaweek, Jack, and the two detectives found, on opening the bundle, that it contained the three missing cases, and a great deal of gold, the former Jack instantly identified as being the property of his employers, the discovery caused him to indulge in a little pantomime business, much to the amusement of the others; and considerably lighter in heart. the party returned to the Mansion House.

On their arrival, it was deemed advisable to communicate as quickly as possible with Sir Fograss; and as it was now about half-past five, and a train started at six, it was agreed that Jack, Poundaweek, and a detective with the regained property, should go down by it to Fograss Court.

Before starting on their journey, the party indulged in a little brandy and water, and congratulated Poundaweek on his fortunate discovery. After Jack and Timothy had put their dress a little in order, and the latter had

written to tell his wife of his going to Fograss Court,— as she already knew of the robbery, through the eldest boy, who had been sent after his father,— the three proceeded to London Bridge, and took their departure in the train; and before they arrived at their destination, the snow had ceased falling, and the moon threw her pale, calm light on the frosty ground.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

We left the company at Fograss Court with sinking spirits, and an undefinable feeling of dulness and apprehension resting on their minds. Sir Fograss's absence had been excused by his lady, but all missed the cheerful tones of his voice, which were wont to animate and enliven every one on this usually joyous day. The worthy Baronet remained closetted with his partner, in deep consultation concerning the robbery. It appeared that the abstracted cases contained large sums in bank-notes and gold; also accepted bills, mortgage deeds, and other securities to a great amount; and they had but little hope of ever regaining the larger part of the property — the loss of which might even

occasion the temporary suspension of the business of the firm.

In the drawing-room, the gloom that had stolen over all the guests could not be removed; the most intimate friends of the family had already been informed of the unfortunate event that had occurred, and the real concern they entertained for Sir Fograss, and those connected with him, prevented their assuming a false air of joy and cheerfulness. Little groups of threes and fours congregated about the large room, conversing seriously and with a mournful earnestness, very different from the usual light train of talk generally maintained on Christmas-days at Fograss Court; while the charades, fireworks, and other amusements, were entirely forgotten. Lord Froodle remarked confidentially to his friend Sir Harry, that it was "jeuced slow, and a bwor." The neighbouring country guests, who had arrived, were surprised and disappointed at the air of restraint that pervaded "The Court," and many wished they had never come at all, if the evening was to be a dull one. In the lower hall the rustics were having tea;

and the serious faces of many of them showed how their hearts were touched by Sir Fograss's (to them) unknown but apparent misfortune.

It was a quarter past seven; the company in the drawing-room were waiting dinner, when Sir Fograss and Mr. Snorton entered. Both looked pale and serious, but the former's kind smile still shone on his benevolent face. The Baronet soon noticed the gloom that shadowed the room in sympathizing sorrow; and he tried his utmost to restore the banished cheerfulness, but only succeeded in raising a little forced merriment, that flickered fitfully, and then expired.

Louisa and Fanny, with Edward and Lieutenant Ponsford, were standing by one of the windows, talking to each other.

"Look!" exclaimed Louisa, as she removed the heavy velvet curtain from the window, "the moon has come out! the clouds have vanished! and the stars are shining very brightly."

"I wish we could believe," said Edward, "that it was ominous of a brighter light breaking on this unfortunate affair."

"I trust it shortly may, my dear fellow,'

said Lieutenant Ponsford, with warmth, and pressing Edward's hand.

"But really," observed Louisa, "we have no right to spoil our friends' dinner and evening by our own selfishness; pray Edward do try and enliven them, let us have our charades and dancing this evening. Perhaps," she added, with a sigh, "it may be the last Christmas we shall spend in this dear old house."

Lieutenant Ponsford squeezed her hand affectionately, and Fanny said:

"Oh, don't say so, Louisa. This unpleasant affair will all be cleared up soon, no doubt."

"I sincerely hope it may," said Edward, despondingly, "but what is that coming up the avenue?"

"A fly or a carriage driving very rapidly," she replied quickly.

"I do believe it brings good news," ejaculated Fanny, in a joyous voice; "I have a presentiment that it does."

"May your presentiment be true, dear Fanny," said Edward, shaking his head.

At that moment the carriage stopped at the

door, and a minute afterwards a footman entered the room, and told his master that three persons wished to see him. Sir Fograss desired them to be shown into the library, and a moment after he quitted the room and entered that apartment, where, to his astonishment, he beheld Jack, Poundaweek, and a detective.

"I am happy to say, Sir Fograss," said Jack, advancing, "that we have discovered all."

"All what?" asked the Baronet, "the robbery!"

"Yes, Sir Fograss, and the property taken, and here it is, sir," said the detective, producing the three cases and the gold, and placing them on the table.

The Baronet sank into a chair completely overcome: he however speedily recovered, and advanced to the table to convince himself that the property really was there, and as soon as he was satisfied of this fact, he rang the bell, and desired a servant to ask Mr. Snorton to come to him directly. The junior partner soon answered the summons.

"We are saved!" said Sir Fograss, advancing to meet him, "the property is found, and here are the discoverers"

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Snorton with energy.

"Yes," added Sir Fograss, "we can now recall our friends to happiness; it grieved me so to see them dull on such a day as this: now, Snorton, just look through the books, I dare say you can tell whether the securities and notes are untouched; and, Mr. Tripples, come and tell me all about this extraordinary affair."

Jack did as he was desired, and rapidly detailed all the circumstances connected with the discovery, and when his narrative was finished, the Baronet shook hands with every one in the room, looking very happy and cheerful; then he said, in a low and kind tone, something to the three about remembering the affair, then Mr. Snorton having gone through the contents of the cases, declared, that as far as he could tell, every thing was untouched, and the junior partner looked better in health and spirits than he had for four hours past.

A knock was now heard at the door, and a footman entered to inquire whether dinner should be served, to which the Baronet replied

in the affirmative, and writing a few lines on a piece of paper, desired the man to take it to her Ladyship.

"And now," he said, "for a merry evening! Mr. Tripples, you dine with us. Poundaweek and the officer will have dinner in the housekeeper's room, and afterwards help the merriment in the lower hall. Come, gentlemen," he added to Snorton and Jack, "we will now go and try to remove the dulness of our guests."

The party separated, and the Baronet, with his partner and clerk entered the drawing-room. As the door opened, every eye was turned towards the Baronet, and almost a dead silence pervaded the company.

"My dear friends," said Sir Fograss; "it is no good making a mystery of that which is past. Our Bank, as many of you know, was robbed to-day; but we have now, thanks partly to my young friend here (pointing to Jack), discovered the thieves, and the stolen property is now safe in my possession."

A pleasant murmur of gratulation ran round the room.

"I thank you," continued the Baronet, "for

the kind sympathy you have shown me to-day, and I trust you will show it still further by banishing the gloomy cloud that has settled on us, and by being as merry as you possibly can."

This speech was received with acclamations of joy, so hearty and even boisterous, that they materially astonished Mr. Snorton's gentility, and a crowd pressed forward to shake hands with the Baronet, Jack, and the junior partner, whilst all in the room brightened up, and the conversation became more animated. Sir Mortram Mac Gillup engaged a new audience for his Chevalier stories; Old Lord Boynton gave his recollections of the Regency, whilst even little Lord Froodle attempted a joke, but failed in making his listeners see the point of it. Happiness and merriment were again in the ascendant at Fograss Court.

The dinner went off admirably, the charades were capitally acted, and the rockets ascended amidst the ecstatic "Oh's" and "Ah's" of the country people. Every amusement that could be thought of was tried, and succeeded to admiration; and all the guests have since declared that they never spent so happy and merry a Christmas Day

before or since. In the lower hall, Poundaweek and the officer speedily removed the dulness that had crept in to mar the day; and the pair, during the remainder of the evening, were alternately the admiration and the awe of the rustics. Fograss Court was the scene of unflagging merriment until nearly six o'clock in the morning; as for Jack, he was in his element, he was immense in charades, and quite a lion for the evening; and fussy, disagreeable Mr. Snorton forgot his Clapham gentility amidst the high-born peo that surrounded him.

At last the lights were gradually extinguished in the old house, and the stars shone brightly and peacefully, while the calm, morning air played a lullaby amongst the leafless branches of the trees, and soothed the pleasure-tired guests to sleep.

Many Christmas Days come and go, marked by no particular features, but the one of which we have written will long be remembered, by at least four persons in the Banking Firm of Fograss, Fograss, Mowton, and Snorton.

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